BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABILITY: TOWARDS RADICAL TRANSFORMATION OF SELF AND WORLD

Chaiyatorn T.Suwan
BSc (University of Southampton, UK)
MBA (Washington University, USA)
MEnvSc (Griffith University, Australia)

School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning, RMIT University

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STATEMENT

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the work presented in this thesis is original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material herein has not been submitted in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Chaiyatorn T.Suwan
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ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability. It explores the impacts of Buddhism on the lives of nine individuals and the implications of these impacts for a sustainable world. This thesis regards sustainability as the most pressing issue at this junction in human history. It believes that the shift to sustainability requires profound individual and social transformations throughout the world and that such transformations necessitate the involvement of the spiritual traditions of the world. As one such tradition, Buddhism has the ability to impart principles and practices that have been applied in daily living for over 2,500 years to contemporary sustainability discourse.

The modern idea of sustainability first became prominent in the international arena in the 1980s when the Brundtland Commission enunciated its vision of the path to sustainability and referred to it as ‘sustainable development’. However, this thesis contends that the concept of sustainable development was flawed from the beginning because it was founded on the idea of perpetual economic growth as the solution to environmental and social problems. Instead, the thesis forwards a holistic, systems approach to sustainability that regards human well-being as the ultimate goal. It adopts two theoretical conceptions of sustainability developed by Donella Meadows – the pyramidal framework for sustainability and the scheme of leverage points – as tools to analyse the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability.

This thesis examines the literature on Buddhism and sustainability. It finds that Buddhism espouses many ecological and social values conducive to a sustainable philosophy of life. In addition, Buddhist economics has experienced rich theoretical developments in recent years and provides an alternative to mainstream economics based on growth. Buddhist economics has helped propel two Buddhist developmental paradigms – Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness and Thailand’s Sufficiency Economy – to the forefront of national agendas in their respective countries, thus demonstrating the renaissance of the application of Buddhist thinking in society. At the micro level, many communities around the world are attempting to translate the most fundamental principles of Buddhism into ways for harmonious living and in an attempt to combat the tide of environmental and social degradation. Thus, Buddhism is making an impact on sustainability at many levels around the world. However, this thesis finds little empirical evidence to demonstrate the effect of Buddhism on forms of personal transformation that leads to sustainable behaviour. This is despite the importance of the idea of transformation and personal growth in Buddhism. This empirical void leads to the aim of the thesis, which is to explore the ways in which the beliefs, practices and transformational tools within Buddhism can contribute to living sustainably.

To achieve this aim, the methodology of mindful inquiry was employed. Mindful inquiry is a methodological union of East and West and integrates four perspectives: critical theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology and Buddhism. It is appropriate for a values-based research such as this one where the orientation of the researcher is critical to the outcome of the research. A method consistent with mindful inquiry is the basic interpretive qualitative study. The basic interpretive qualitative study used in this study combines elements from ethnography, case study, phenomenology and critical research. It was used to explore the lifeworlds of nine Buddhist participants in order to understand the impact of Buddhism on their lives. The major data gathering technique was in-depth interviews although participant observation and document collection were also used. Analysis of data proceeded through the constant comparative method.
The findings from this thesis are divided into three themes. Firstly, the idea of personal sustainability is forwarded as a concept to help understand the impact of Buddhism. Personal sustainability concerns the psychological ‘integratedness’ of individuals to enable the achievement of higher levels of well-being. The findings suggest that Buddhism has significantly enhanced the personal sustainability level of all nine participants. Secondly, Meadows’ ideas of paradigm shift and paradigm transcendence are explored. The findings suggest that paradigm shifts or paradigm transcendence have occurred among the participants through the adoption of Buddhist principles and meditative practices. Thirdly, the notions of happiness and purpose in life are investigated. The findings highlight radical changes in the participants’ understandings of these notions and the nature of these understandings that are significantly different from conventional views.

As a result of these findings, the thesis argues that the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability can be considerable because Buddhism contributes to the protection of natural capital, the enrichment of social and human capitals, and a deepened understanding of well-being, which is divorced from simplistic ideas such as material accumulation and sensual gratification. The thesis concludes by highlighting the potentials of Buddhism to instigate profound personal and social transformations that could lead to a sustainable world.
Cartoon from Nation newspaper on 5th May 2007
after the meeting of scientists on climate change in Bangkok.
Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. We are faced now with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late ... We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: Too late.

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Religion without science is blind; Science without religion is lame.

– Albert Einstein

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

- Margaret Mead
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The State of Our World

1998. I was diving among the pristine reefs of Komodo National Park in Indonesia. The undersea life was incredibly vibrant and I witnessed plump sharks, huge manta rays and a multitude of colourful fish. Despite the natural beauty, there was an ugly side, not of nature, but of humans. As we were diving, dynamite bombing was being carried out in some places, reducing coral reefs that had taken thousands of years to build to graveyards. All we could do was chase bandit boats, hoping to deter them even a little, and sign with grief at the acts of atrocity to nature and all life that depends on her services.

Dynamite bombing may be locally destructive but it is merely a symptom of escalating global
ecological destruction resulting from the ‘treadmill of production’ of capitalism (Schnaiberg & Kenneth 1993). At the heart of capitalism is the idea that self-interest, through the ‘invisible hand’ of the market, can provide the necessary goods for society (Smith 2000). This idea emerged as the critical foundation of economics as reflected in the writing of John Maynard Keynes (1963:372):

For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to every one that fair is foul and foul is fair; for foul is useful and fair is not. Avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight.

Though Keynes was well aware of the dangers of self-interest, he seemed to have underestimated its power and thus was willing to tolerate the negative impacts. However, the widespread embrace of economics, especially in its present neo-liberal form, has lead to a situation described by Sivaraksa (2005) as ‘market fundamentalism’, where market forces sweep across the globe without restraint bringing with them materialistic Western values at the expense of traditional cultures.

The impacts of market fundamentalism on the world have been enormous. One impact has been the vast inequities between rich countries and poor countries (Stewart 1998; World Bank 2006). For example, 126 out of 1,000 babies born in Mali never survive past the first year compared to only 7 out of 1,000 in America (World Bank 2006). The differences within each country are also great, as reflected in issues such immunization and education, where marked disparities exist between the wealthiest and poorest quartiles. Another impact is ethnic conflict which culminated in the World Trade Center bombings and the US response in form of the ‘War on Terror’, which some believe to be a disguised attempt at securing oil (Galtung 2002). Yet, perhaps, the most serious impact is the deleterious consequence of economic demands on the natural world. The environmental degradation wrought by overexploitation of resources has been well-documented and includes deforestation, rapid extinction of species, desertification, collapse of fisheries, depletion of ground water and declining river flows (UNDP 2006; UNEP 2007; Worldwatch Institute 2003). However, these problems are now subordinated by the more pressing concern of climate change (IPCC 2007), or what Gore (2006) calls ‘an inconvenient truth’. Climate change is now regarded as a threat to the very survival of life on Earth:

[It] poses risks not just for the world’s poor, but for the entire planet - and for future generations. Our current path offers a one-way route to ecological disaster. There are uncertainties relating to the speed of warming, and to the exact timing and forms of the impacts. But the risks associated with accelerated disintegration of the Earth’s great ice sheets, the warming of the oceans, the collapse of rainforest systems and other possible outcomes are real. They have the potential to set in train processes that could recast the human and physical geography of our planet. (UNDP 2007:21)

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1 Sometimes referred to as ‘greed’.
Nowhere is the situation graver than in the Amazon. Climate change, compounded by human factors such as logging and ranching, may result in the destruction of more than half of the Amazon rainforest over the next 15 to 25 years (Nepstad 2007). Since the Amazon is the largest ‘air conditioner’ of the world, influencing global rainfall, temperature and weather patterns, this could spell catastrophe. To make matters worse, the Amazon is only one of several ‘tipping points’ (Pearce 2007; Whitty 2006) that, if triggered, could cause rapid, devastating change across the entire planet. These tipping points include, for example, the changing of the North Atlantic current, the melting of the earth’s great ice sheets and the release of methane from underground reserves.

While the risks of planetary chaos are now undeniably high, governments around the world have often been ineffective at simultaneously managing economic demands, halting environmental destruction and reducing poverty (Adair 2006). Unfortunately, these failures have produced a dangerous and unsustainable world where vast material wealth accrues to a minority of the world’s population while leaving the social and ecological health of the planet on a knife-edge.

1.2 The Way Out: Sustainability

The solution out of this crisis is ‘sustainability’. Sustainability is a simple concept: “a sustainable system is one which survives or persists” (Costanza & Patten 1995:193). Hence a sustainable world is one that can go on indefinitely, or at least a long period of time that is consistent with geological timescale.²

A more comprehensive, systemic definition of sustainability is Ben-Eli’s (2007:13):

[A] dynamic equilibrium in the processes of interaction between a population and the carrying capacity of an environment, such that the population develops to express its full potential without adversely and irreversibly affecting the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends.

Ben-Eli anchors his definition on carry capacity, the idea that there is a finite population the environment can sustain (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 1992). However, he forwards sustainability as a dynamic concept that opens the possibilities for what a society can look like as conditions change, while recognising that ecological boundaries and limits must be maintained. Again, the key idea is the ability of human society to flourish and keep going over the long term (Gilman 1990; Hart 1999) while protecting the capacity of nature to regenerate.

² Costanza and Patten (1995:195) use the phrase “a life span that is consistent with the system’s time and space scale” because, in reality, nothing lasts forever, even the universe.
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Perhaps the most complete and systemic expression of sustainability is Donella Meadows’ pyramidal framework (Meadows 1999a). It uses the idea of ‘capitals’ (human, built, social and natural) in relation to the satisfaction of human well-being. Sustainability concerns living off the interest from these capitals rather than drawing them down. This concept is illuminated by her example of the use of natural capital:

We should draw water from the outflow of a lake, not drain down the lake; catch fish at the rate of which they regenerate, not consume the breeding population; harvest forest no faster than they can grow back; farm so soil doesn’t erode. (Meadows 1999a:46-47)

The objective of sustainability is to maintain all forms of capital in such a way as to achieve the most well-being with the least material input and impact on nature. Meadows’ framework provides a way to understand complex relationships between the many different components of a complex system and how action can contribute to or diminish the sustainability of that system.

Meadows’ framework is used as the theoretical foundation in this study and is explored further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 8.

1.3 Obstacles to Sustainability

Despite the ‘obvious’ need to practice caution and protect capitals, something well-understood by indigenous cultures over many centuries (Berkes 1999), and despite decades of debate and conferences, modern industrial society has failed to adopt sustainability in any meaningful way – hence, the aforementioned spiralling of environmental destruction. The idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as promoted by some businesses and governments can be ‘deeply flawed’ because, as Porritt (2007:20) argues:

If you [businesses] are being given permission by the government of the territories in which you operate to go on, quite legally, dumping costs onto the environment, then all the CSR tinkering you do at the margins is more or less irrelevant.

To achieve sustainability, forms of capitalism, especially associated with extreme liberalism of the market, will have to be transformed (O'Riordan 1991). This is because these forms of capitalism regard nature as something to be manipulated, moulded and dominated, and human beings as knowing “no limits of sufficiency, satiation, or appropriateness” (Orr 1992:25). A “sea change” of culture and ideals

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3 This modern history of sustainability is documented in Chapter 2.
4 For example, the group of corporations represented by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and the UK government have actively supported CSR as a mean to sustainable development. See http://www.wbcsd.org and http://www.csr.gov.uk respectively.
(PCE 2004:5) would pave the way for a post-industrial society where humans become part of the earth community rather than locked in a separate world unto ourselves (Berry 2007).

The task of making this sea change happen will be formidable, as Dresner (2002:167) notes: … there are powerful vested interests that favour unsustainability…. the present generation has vested interest in putting itself before the claims of future generations. Those who live in particularly unsustainable ways – the affluent consumers – have a strong vested interest in resisting change immediately. What is more, the poor of the South often want wealth quickly and are tempted to ignore the long term consequences.

Dresner (2002:172) concludes that the world’s long-running obsession with modernity prevents the transition to sustainability because sustainability “is about maintaining things, while modernity is about constant change”. This begs the question of whether there is something fundamental to human nature that is inherently biased towards unsustainability. A variety of ideas have been put forward although without much conclusive evidence.

Milbrath (1995) contends that ingrained psychological and cultural factors explain why people forestall change towards sustainability. He asserts that the majority of people are beleaguered, for example, by: ignorance of a systemic, non-linear view of the world; a profound fascination with technology; deep psychological investment in the status quo; and, relative deprivation and frustration of a competitive, consumerist society. McKnight and Sutton (1994) argue that this situation is compounded by self-interest and social trap. For example, self-interest binds us to a culture of individualism that precludes caring for the common good:

As we are what our culture shapes us to be, it is a little much to expect members of an individualistic culture to embrace cooperative actions towards a sustainable future that will not be reached in our lifetimes. Many Westerners are still firmly wedded to individual ownership of resources, acquiring material wealth and the idea that economic growth will enhance our futures … (McKnight & Sutton 1994:611)

The social trap that McKnight and Sutton refer to is the problem of the ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin 1973) in which the lack of social trust and equity makes it impossible to manage resources effectively. In concurrence, Oskamp (2002) summarises the reasons for the opposition to change as inertia, selfishness, helplessness, fear, and a belief in technology as a panacea.

Gladwin, Newburry and Reiskin (1998) make a deeper analysis theorising that the human mind, especially the mind associated with modernity and Western elitism, is unsustainable. Simply put, this mind is predisposed against sustainability and contains character traits that result in unsustainable, and seemingly irrational, behaviour. They suggest four problematic origins of this mind:
1) a cognitively bounded *biological mind*, inherited from our ancient ancestors, which is maladapted to the modern challenges of systemic complexity;

2) an obsolete *worldview mind* guided by tacit and outmoded assumptions about how the world works, based on religious, philosophical, and early scientific traditions;

3) an addicted *contemporary mind* that has been powerfully programmed to believe in various myths and ideological doctrines that appear to serve the interests of a few at the expense of the many; and,

4) a delusional *psychodynamic mind* that deploys subconscious ego-defense mechanisms to ward off any realistic and moral anxieties posed by awareness of ecological and social deterioration. (Gladwin et al. 1998:238-240)

Thus, Gladwin et al. (1998:263) believe that moving to a psychology of sustainability will be “extraordinary difficult and painful” such is the extent of ignorance, underdevelopment and conditioning of the mind. However, they also argue that this task is a defining one for the human race.

The alternative psychology of ecopsychology also argues that the modern mind is fundamentally flawed. Ecopsychology postulates that this came about with the advent of agriculture and pastoralism through which humans and the natural world became disconnected (Hibbard 2003). This disconnection, widening with time and modernity, has resulted in the “repression of the ecological unconscious” and that this repression is “the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society” (Roszak 2001:320). The madness manifests itself in traits such as an atomistic sense of self, a feeling of alienation from the natural world, narcissism, an addiction to technology, an addiction to consumption, a desire to dominate nature, and a denial of responsibility to care for nature (Hibbard 2003). Thus, ecopsychology proposes that a major step towards ecological sustainability is through “a psychological reconciliation with the living earth” (Fisher 2002:xiii).

Given the broad array of disciplinary approaches to the question of unsustainability, and the breadth of their underlying philosophies, there is no consensus on the reasons why the modern human mind seems unsustainable. However, there is a general conviction that a multi-dimensional, radical transformation must occur, and soon. This has lead Grof, Laszlo and Russell (1999) to call for a ‘consciousness revolution’ meaning the deep changing of values, thinking and worldviews in consciousness.

### 1.4 The Spiritual Challenge of Sustainability

It is something new and unexpected in the history of the human species, to live in a way that we cannot continue to live. It would follow from this that we must change. I am afraid that it is not a question of whether we will change, only how soon we will change and how well…. the first things we should be asking are
where we are, what we are, and how we look at the world and ourselves. (Grof et al. 1999:1 - stress in original)\(^5\)

Grof et al. suggest that difficult existential and epistemological questions must be explored in envisioning a ‘consciousness revolution’ for sustainability. These questions are decidedly spiritual in nature. Indeed, there has been no shortage of calls for the coupling of spirituality with the drive towards sustainability. Thirty years ago, Ophuls (1977:238) wrote:

… the crisis of ecological scarcity is fundamentally a moral and spiritual crisis. In looking out at the ecological ruin we have made of the earth, we see what manner of people we have become.... But the point has been reached where such a vicious circle can no longer continue without serious consequences for humanity. The earth is teaching us a moral lesson: the individual virtues that have always been necessary for ethical and spiritual reasons have now become imperative for practical ones.

The importance of spirituality has also been enunciated by other authors (Ben-Eli 2007; Bender 1996; Berry 1995; 2007; Birch 1993; Capra 1996; Christie 2002; Galtung & Ikeda 1995; Gardner 2002; Garner 2003; Meadows 1999b; Orr 2002; Orr 2003; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995; Reason 2002; Welford 1997).

Environmental educator, David Orr (2002), provides a compelling argument for the necessity of spirituality in sustainability. Orr contends that developing an elevated sense of spirituality is critical because it provides the foundation for the kinds of education, governance and citizenship that can minimise human impacts on the planet. There are three parts to Orr’s argument. Firstly, borrowing from E. F. Schumacher (1973), he views problems in our societies as ‘divergent’ with complex properties that cannot be resolved logically but, instead, must be transcended. An example is the many ethnic conflicts and religious wars – the epitome of unsustainability - which can only be resolved by the “profound sense of forgiveness and mercy that rises above the convergent logic of justice” (Orr 2002:1459). Secondly, Orr believes that awareness and spirituality are vital for humanity to define its purpose:

A spiritually impoverished world is not sustainable because meaninglessness, anomie, and despair will corrode our desire to sustain it and the belief that humanity is worth sustaining.... Genuine sustainability, in other words, will come not from superficial changes but from a deeper process akin to humankind growing to a fuller stature. (Orr 2002:1457)

Hence,

The spiritual renewal necessary for the transition must provide convincing grounds on which humankind can justify the project of sustainability.... A robust spiritual sense may not mean that we are created in the image of God, but it must

\(^5\) This book is a dialogue between Grof, Laszlo and Russell. In this quotation, Laszlo is speaking.
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offer hope that we may grow into something more than a planetary plague. (Orr 2002:1459)

Thirdly, Orr suggests that the enormous task of confronting scientism, consumerism and a culture deep in denial of the very real nature of our mortality cannot be delegated to anything but spirituality. In elaboration of Orr, McDaniel (2002) sees the root of both scientism and consumerism in a fundamental human drive, namely, “the will to mastery and thus to reduce all things to a collection of objects” (p.1463). He sees these ‘religions’ as depriving us of higher means, such as wisdom, love, compassion and empathy. The lack of such means or principles prevents us from entering “more deeply into a celebration of our interconnectedness in the web of life” (p.1463). Compounded by the desperate need for a new reverence of nature, Orr and McDaniel argue that spiritual renewal is needed across all cultures because it is “the sine qua non of the transition to sustainability” (Orr 2002:1459).

An exemplar of the integration of sustainability and spirituality is the Earth Charter. The Earth Charter is a vision and a set of principles or values for sustainability. It is an unfinished legacy of the Rio Earth Summit that finally emerged in 2000 after years of deliberation by people all over the world. The spirit of the Earth Charter can be seen in the first four principles:

1. Respect Earth and life in all its diversity;
2. Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love;
3. Build democratic societies that are just, sustainable, participatory and peaceful
4. Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations
(Earth Charter Initiative 2000)

The element of spirituality is clearly visible within these key principles. Respect for Earth and life is diametrically opposed to the philosophy of unbridled economic growth because it is a profoundly caring and spiritual value rather than a materialistic enterprise. Care, understanding, compassion and love are universal traits found in all spiritual traditions but which also have roots in the deepest depth of our hearts – the spiritual qualities in all of us (McDaniel 2002; Orr 2002). The Earth Charter posits that such qualities will enable us to build truly democratic societies and also protect Earth for future generations.

The Earth Charter is an attempt to generate a new global consciousness with a new set of ethics that replaces market fundamentalism and consumerism. It aims to persuade humanity into a new age, or what Berry (2007:10) calls the ‘Ecozoic era’. This is an era in which “humans become present to the powers of the Earth in a mutually enhancing manner” (p.10). It will require humans to “appreciate and honour the principle that the Earth is primary and humans are derivative” (p.10).

The Earth Charter is also a rallying call for action based upon a resurgence of spirituality:
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Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life. (Earth Charter Initiative 2000:4)

Thus, the Earth Charter demonstrates the feasibility of the integration of spirituality and sustainability, and a way in which sustainability can be a moral code to guide daily actions.

1.5 Buddhism, Spirituality and Sustainability

As a major spiritual tradition, Buddhism has been described as containing values similar to those necessary for a sustainable society (Birch 1993; Brown 1981; Galtung 1993; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995; Schumacher 1973). Buddhism has a number of strengths in this regard, namely:

1. It offers a credible, ethical critique of the dominant paradigm and its fundamental beliefs.
2. It provides a comprehensive worldview consistent with emerging scientific understanding.
3. It supports a higher purpose for human existence.
4. It contains a psychological framework, including essential practices and techniques, for human transformation.

Firstly, Buddhism does not support the dominant paradigm of economism. Indeed, it critiques the present situation of unsustainability as the result of moral decline, the escalation of the three poisons of greed (craving), hatred (ill-will) and ignorance (delusion). As de Silva (2000:94) writes:

> When mankind is demoralized through greed, famine is the natural outcome; when moral degeneration is due to ignorance, epidemic is the inevitable result; when hatred is the demoralizing force, widespread violence is the ultimate outcome.… If immorality grips society, people and nature deteriorate; if morality reigns, the quality of human life and nature improves. The greed, hatred, and delusion produce pollution within and without.

de Silva’s comments seem to reflect accurately a world inundated by a never-ending series of social and ecological crises as he emphasises the connection between the mind and the condition of the world.6

Such a state of immorality supports many collective, erroneous beliefs that serve to heighten the impact of greed, hatred and delusion. According to the monk scholar, P.A. Payutto (1987), three erroneous beliefs form the basis of modern society:

1. The perception that mankind is separate from nature, that mankind must control, conquer or manipulate nature according to his desires.
2. The perception that fellow human beings are not ‘fellow human beings’; thus focusing on the differences among people rather than the common situation.
3. The perception that happiness is dependent on an abundance of material possessions.

(p.7)

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6 This view is shared by many Buddhist scholars, for example, Loy (2003), Payutto (1987) and Sivaraksa (2005).
Payutto asserts that it is this third erroneous belief that has especially wreaked havoc onto the world: because humans seek happiness from greater material possessions, they must destroy nature and other humans who compete for the same thing, and that the first two erroneous beliefs become the justification for unlimited violence. Thus, Payutto believes in the primary importance of realigning life’s purpose towards happiness that is independent of the material world – hence denying the need for its manipulation – in remedying the problems of unsustainability.

Secondly, Buddhist worldviews are becoming recognised as being consistent or parallel with theories, philosophies and sciences such as Gaia (Roberts 1990), deep ecology (Henning 2002), phenomenology (Varela & Depraz 2003), transformational learning (Healy 2001), cognitive psychology (Abram 1990; Claxton 2000), neuroscience (Kurak 2003), evolutionary biology (Waldron 2003) and quantum physics (Ames 2003; Zeilinger 2003). For example, Buddhism views the ‘true reality’ of the self as something deeply conditioned, interdependent and ultimately embedded within the social and natural surrounding (Hayward 1990). This view has gained currency in science and is regarded as converging with the perceptual theories of Merleau-Ponty and J. J. Gibson, where perception is understood “not as a cerebral event but as a direct and reciprocal interchange between the organism and its world” (Abram 1990:85). This is mirrored by developments in neuroscience in which understandings of human thinking, derived from research at the neural activity level, are found to be remarkably similar to Buddhist theory (Kurak 2003). As Varela (2000) concludes, cognitive science is now closer than ever to becoming the ‘science of inter-being’, where the boundary between self and the world is so blurred, if at all existing, as to be indefinable. This is something that Buddhism has always asserted.

Thirdly, Buddhism regards enlightenment (nirvana) as the ultimate goal of human existence. Thus, Buddhism supplies the higher spiritual purpose that Orr (2002) deems vital to the project of sustainability. However, enlightenment has often been described historically in a negative form, for example, as the “Unborn, Unoriginated, Uncreated, Unformed” (Keown 2004:195). This makes it very difficult to comprehend the nature of enlightenment other than that it is the antithesis of cyclic existence (rebirth). Perhaps, a better way of understanding enlightenment is as the re-orientation of interpersonal relationships. As Hershock (2007:n.p.) explains:

> Liberating happiness [i.e. enlightenment] is not something achieved or gained; it is a quality of relationship through which our entire situation is suffused with compassion, equanimity, loving-kindness and joy in the good fortune of others. Ultimately, there is no freedom or happiness to be attained. There is only the happiness of relating-freely in deep and mutual enrichment. (stress in original)
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Such a positive view of enlightenment provides a glimmer of the possibilities of human purpose, to transcend the mundane and douse the fire of conflict burning in the world at the expense of human flourishing and nature (Onkom 2003).

Fourthly, Buddhism offers both a comprehensive psychological framework and an array of psychotherapeutic techniques compiled over 2,500 years. As Watson, Batchelor and Claxton (2000:viii) assert:

… Buddhism offers not only theory, a philosophy of process much in tune with contemporary Western discourse, but, most importantly, a way. This is a way of practice, a cultivation, a path towards change and clear sight leading to happiness, authenticity and connection.

This Buddhist way can also be regarded as “a universal, humanitarian way of living” in which lifelong learning can take place (Johnson 2002:111). At the heart of the lifelong learning process is meditation. Meditation is the practice of becoming aware of the deepest nature of human experiences. Meditation allows us to change and, little by little, exist differently:

To practice meditation is to encounter the open dimension of being. For you come to the practice in one state of mind, a state which may seem fixed, final and all pervading, and you leave the practice in another state of mind. It is as if, over the course of the practice, you pass from one world into another, and that passage, to whatever extent it takes place, is by way of the open dimension. (Kulananda 1997:119)

Meditation, rather than being otherworldly, is the practice of embodying interdependence. It is the Buddhist art of facing and uprooting human narcissism (Epstein 1995). Meditation is necessarily accompanied by ethics, and as such is of utmost relevance to the task of human transformation in the transition towards a sustainable world.

1.6 Aim and Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the ways in which the beliefs, practices and transformational tools within Buddhism can contribute to living sustainably. Through a Buddhist perspective, the study investigates the process required to enable people to live harmoniously with each other and with nature. Four research questions are used to assist achieving this aim:

1. How have the beliefs and practices of Buddhism helped people address the problems of personal (un)sustainability in their lives?

2. To what extent, and in what ways, does seeking to live through following Buddhist beliefs and practices lead to a process of paradigmatic transformation in people's lives?
3. To what extent, and in what ways, does the process of transformation contribute to a change in purpose and goals of life and notion of happiness?

4. What are the implications of Buddhism for sustainability thinking and practice?

The development of the study’s aim and research questions needs to be understood within the context of the entire literature review. Some ideas have been introduced in this chapter but the bulk of the literature review lies in Chapters 2 and 3.

The significance of the study can be summarised by Gary Snyder’s (1974:92) famous lines:

The mercy of the West has been social revolution; the mercy of the East has been individual insight into the basic self/void. We need both.

These words ring as true today as they did thirty years ago at the height of the Vietnam War when Snyder wrote them. With unsustainability threatening global chaos, Eastern philosophies have yet to assert themselves in the mainstream West while Western ideals have also failed to make significant headway in the East.

This study is a merging of East and West, the merging of the lived principles and practices of Buddhism with the imperatives of sustainability. The significance of the study can be divided into two categories: the significance for sustainability and the significance for Buddhism.

**Significance for sustainability**

Berry (2007:11) believes that at this juncture in history “a vast new orientation to the universe and to the earth will be needed to reorient the human community toward a viable future”. The enormity of this task requires the engagement with the spiritual traditions of the world (Gardner 2002). As one such tradition, Buddhism offers a large reservoir of wisdom that can inform many aspects of sustainability. Four aspects are noted here.

Firstly, this study attempts to further undermine the hegemony of Western modernity and scientism which, together, constitute the global metaphysics underlying unsustainability. Despite their supposed break with Christianity, both modernity and science are still founded on certain problematic Christian beliefs. As Lynn White (1967:1206) states:

Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man’s relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe.
Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. (stress in original)

The resultant ingrained culture of self-centredness and separation is planted so firmly not only in the West but also now in the East that it needs to be challenged. This study is part of that effort. Thus, this study does not aspire to be value-neutral but is socially critical in that it attempts to “facilitate a constructive engagement with the social world that starts from the presumption that existing arrangements do not exhaust the range of possibilities” (Calhoun 1995:xiv). As discussed in Section 1.5, Buddhism is ideally suited to assist in this task.

Secondly, the concept of sustainability as presented in much of mainstream discourse, is ambiguous and ‘operationally insufficient’ (Ben-Eli 2007). Donella Meadows’ pyramidal framework (introduced in Section 1.2 and elaborated in Chapter 2) is regarded here as a landmark in the theoretical development of sustainability. As it has received little attention, this study attempts to use Meadows’ framework to highlight the practical contributions of Buddhist beliefs and practices to sustainability. Thus, it is a much-needed project to bring her framework to the fore and to emphasise the need to utilise concrete, systemic theories when discussing or applying sustainability.

Thirdly, Western discourse in sustainability has presented very few, if any, transformative options for achieving sustainability. A typical approach in environmental psychology is to focus on the human-nature relation and recommend changes in values and behaviour to something more environmentally benign (for example, Biel & Thogersen; Oskamp 2002; Thogersen & Olander 2002). However, as Nickerson (2003) observes, there is rarely any evidence of the long-lasting change required:

Most studies of the effectiveness of interventions aimed at behavior modification have not included checks for the persistence of effects beyond the intervention period. A typical finding of the few studies that have obtained data on this question is that any behavior changes effected during the intervention have largely disappeared soon after termination of the experiment. (p.112)

It may be that many approaches to environmental psychology and social psychology are too shallow to address the subject especially if the human mind is inherently unsustainable as Gladwin et al. (1997) claim. Thus, Gladwin et al. suggest a research agenda that includes questions such as:

- What are the most important determinants of unsustainable and sustainable thinking?
- How do unsustainable and sustainable cognition interact with concomitant emotion and behaviour?
- What explains individual variation in sustainable thinking, feeling and behaviour?
- What therapies are indicated for unsustainable patterns of thinking?
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• Given the urgency of needed transformation, how fast can human minds and behaviours be effectively changed?
• Does the ultimate resolution of unsustainability via unification of mind and nature depend on a transcendence into the transpersonal or spiritual realm? (p.263-266)

These important questions arise from a Western psychological perspective and, thus, reflect the dearth of information available on the nature of mind with regards to sustainability. This study seeks to uncover any transformative processes that may result from Buddhist beliefs and practices and, hence, may shed light on some of these questions. However, the emphasis is squarely on understanding the impact of Buddhist beliefs and practices rather than answering these questions which are derived from the theories of Gladwin and his colleagues.

Fourthly, this study seeks to provide insights into social-structural change toward sustainability. The literature contains many such ideas but they are, in most cases, unavoidably coloured by the Judeo-Christian cultural heritage. Hence forwarding ideas about sustainability based upon Buddhism and its profoundly different views of life and the universe has the potential to expand the options for future debate.

Significance to Buddhism

Re-contextualising age-old principles is a central way for spiritual traditions to regain relevance and stay relevant (Birch 1993). Sustainability is the most pressing issue of our time, as it will determine whether and how we will survive in the future (Orr 2002). As a result, sustainability offers Buddhism an opportunity for such renewal. While the dharma, the teachings at the heart of Buddhism, is timeless and applicable to all people and all races, some Buddhist traditions have tended to avoid engagement with worldly affairs, instead preferring to concentrate on personal salvation. For example, the main order of Buddhist monks in Thailand “remains silent and inactive” despite immense social and environmental problems (Puntarigvivat 1998:n.p.). Instead, it takes the stance that “if all individuals were ethical, problems would be solved naturally” (Puntarigvivat 1998:n.p.). This situation is not confined only to Theravada Buddhism. For example, Cho (2000) argues that the Mahayana phrase ‘When one’s mind becomes purified, society will also be purified’ demonstrates that “Buddhism has a rather naïve notion concerning social issues: the communal good can be realized through the promotion of individual morality” (p.77). While there is some truth in this belief, it fails to realise the inescapable,  

7 For example, most of the literature on sustainability cited in this study is written by Western authors born in the Judeo-Christian cultures and operating under the scientific foundation laid down in the last millennium as a result of Christian beliefs (Lynn White 1967).
often overwhelming, impact of social and economic structures on people’s lives. Thus, Puntarigvivat (1998:n.p.) concludes:

Buddhism seems to lack a precise theory and praxis to address the concrete issues of contemporary socio-political suffering and its liberation. Traditional Buddhism provides guidelines for personal moral conduct such as self-restraint, patience, zeal, compassion, generosity, and mindfulness, but these moral concepts need to be reinterpreted in modern context and integrated into a social ethical theory.

This study seeks to further this ongoing reinterpretation of Buddhism and offer examples of praxis that can help ensure the relevance of Buddhism not only in the East but also throughout the world. In a globalised world, Buddhism cannot remain outside the realm of politics, and it would be a significant loss to the world should it do so (Galtung 1993). Besides, the sustainability of the world will ultimately determine the sustainability of Buddhism.

1.7 Note on Terminology

At this point, I would like to draw attention to the two main terms in this study: ‘sustainability’ and ‘Buddhism’. The meanings of these terms as used in this thesis are clarified here.

**Sustainability vs. Sustainable Development**

This study centres on the concept of sustainability not sustainable development although the terms often appear interchangeably in the literature. As already defined, sustainability is about a steady state that can continue indefinitely. Sustainable development implies a way of achieving sustainability, but this can be misleading. Mainstream literature, especially among governments, institutions and businesses, often regards sustainable development as a goal in itself. This is because sustainable development has often become another platform for business-as-usual economic growth (Doyle 1998; Jacobs 1999; Welford 1997). It has become normalised and commodified, and, as such, is neither ‘sustainable’ nor ‘developmental’ (Luke 2005). Such approaches to sustainable development are synonymous with ‘sustainable growth’, which Daly and Townsend (1993:267) deride as “a bad oxymoron - self-contradictory as prose, and unevocative as poetry”, and which Voinov and Farley (2007:106) declare “thermodynamically impossible”. These issues are explored further in Chapter 2.

To avoid confusion, this study only uses the term ‘sustainability’. Nevertheless, many authors use the term ‘sustainable development’ out of deference for its institutionalised ubiquitousness even though their underlying philosophy may have little in common with mainstream economics. In these cases, ‘sustainable development’ is kept but only if the original quotation is used.
Buddhism

Buddhism as a religion is not homogenous. Buddhism contains many schools of beliefs in both its Theravada and Mahayana forms. Theravada Buddhism is the dominant tradition in South-East Asia and Sri Lanka while Mahayana Buddhism pervades in North Asia. However, despite differences in doctrinal interpretations, all schools in both traditions share the same beliefs in the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. These include the Four Noble Truths (which encompass the Eightfold Path), dependent origination (interdependence), nirvana (enlightenment) and the ethical precepts.\(^8\)

This study adopts a pan-Buddhism approach and seeks to be sensitive to both Theravada and Mahayana perspectives. Nevertheless, it would be impossible for this researcher to remain ‘neutral’ (even if such a position was desirable) given my Thai Theravada cultural heritage and the literary sources available to me in Thai and English languages. Nevertheless, the blossoming literature on Buddhism’s engagement with world issues from both traditions is converging at such a rapid rate that it makes virtually no difference which school one belongs too. Buddhism is diverse but its core of selflessness and kindness brings people together. In such a globalised world, many Buddhists are also influenced by more than one school of thought. This is reflected in my own worldviews which are no longer attached to Theravada beliefs as I embrace any essence of Buddhism that can inform life’s conduct. In the end, I believe that any rendition of the dharma the Buddha taught is inevitably personal.

1.8 The Thesis in Outline

This chapter has introduced the concept of sustainability together with an outline of the psychological barriers to sustainability. It has also posed the idea that spirituality is vital to sustainability and that Buddhism is well suited to this task. In addition, the aim, research questions and significance of the study have been articulated.

Chapter 2 traces the history of Western thinking about sustainability from its beginning during the rise of the environmental movement in the second half of the Twentieth Century to current debates about sustainable development as a metamorphosis of the growth agenda. Chapter 2 examines an alternative approach to sustainability founded on holism, spirituality and recognition of the urgency of radical change. The chapter finishes with an analysis of Donella Meadows’ framework for sustainability and her scheme of leverage points. Meadows’ framework and scheme provide a comprehensive systemic pathway to sustainability that will be used to analyse Buddhism’s contribution to sustainability in this study.

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\(^8\) In the most basic form, there are five ethical precepts for the laity. These are described in Chapter 3.
Chapter 3 maps the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability at a number of levels. At the philosophical level, it reviews the ecological and social outlook of Buddhism to provide an understanding of the ethos behind Buddhist initiatives in sustainability. This leads to a description of Buddhist economics, a significant theoretical contribution to the alternative discourse in sustainability and development. Two examples of national development paradigms, Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Thailand’s Sufficiency Economy, are provided as ways of embodying Buddhist economic principles. At the level of the community, several examples are provided in both the East and West. However, the literature review finds little evidence of research on the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability at the individual level, despite Buddhism’s emphasis on individual transformation. The chapter concludes with a statement of the aim of this study, including the four research questions, and how these were derived from the literature.

Chapter 4 outlines the research design used to answer the research questions. Conducting research is regarded as a value-laden enterprise like any other human activities (Lather 1991) and the chapter begins by describing the non-positivist metaperspective of mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro 1998). Mindful inquiry is the synthesis of four traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory and Buddhism. The key characteristics of these traditions are reviewed to provide the philosophical outlook of this study. Chapter 4 then describes the research method that was used - the basic interpretive qualitative study as outlined by Merriam (2002b). This method employs the data gathering techniques of in-depth interviews, participant observation and document collection. These techniques are reviewed. This chapter also examines the issue of trustworthiness in scientific research. It proposes that Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) naturalistic criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are appropriate for judging trustworthiness in a non-positivist inquiry such as this one. Chapter 4 concludes by outlining the actual conduct of the study and the ethical issues involved. The major events that occurred during the study, which consisted of four major stages, are highlighted to provide a detailed understanding of the research process.

Chapters 5 to 8 present the findings of this study, with each chapter corresponding to each of the four research questions. Chapter 5 addresses Research Question 1. It introduces the nine participants and outlines the challenges to personal sustainability each one has experienced. It also tells the story of each participant’s meeting with Buddhism and the impact this had on his/her life. Chapter 6 addresses Research Question 2. It focuses on important Buddhist beliefs that underpin the paradigms of the participants. It describes how a transformation of worldviews came about and the impact on behaviour. Chapter 7 addresses Research Question 3. It concerns the participants’ interpretations of purpose in life and the notion of happiness. It examines the subtle understanding of these two ideas that have been
derived from Buddhism and that challenges materialistic or theistic thinking. Chapter 8 addresses Research Question 4. It is a synthesis that places the findings of the study as described in the previous three chapters within Meadows’ theoretical innovations that include her systemic sustainability framework and the scheme of leverage points. Thus, it describes the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability using the ideas of ‘capitals’ and well-being. Chapter 8 also discusses the implications of Buddhist beliefs and practices on the transformative process needed to achieve sustainability.

Chapter 9 consists of two major sections. The first section provides a summary of the findings of the study and their implications for sustainability. A summary of answers to each research question is provided and important conclusions are articulated. The second section provides recommendations for action and further research. These focus on five themes: personal sustainability, human transformation, structural issues, science and sustainability and challenges for personal action.
CHAPTER 2:
A BRIEF HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY THINKING

We must choose … to make the 21st century a time of renewal. By seizing the opportunity that is bound up in this crisis, we can unleash the creativity, innovation, and inspiration that are just as much part of our human birthright as our vulnerability to greed and pettiness. The choice is ours. The responsibility is ours. The future is ours.

- Al Gore (2006:296)

2.1 Emergence of the Modern Concept of Sustainability

It is difficult to trace the origins of the modern concept of sustainability but it probably began in the early second half of the Twentieth Century with the publication of *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962) and *Limits to Growth* (Meadows, Meadows, Randers & Behrens 1972). The former documented the disturbing health effects of pesticides on humans and other species through the food chain, and created unprecedented public concern for the environment. However, it was *Limits to Growth* that first articulated the systemic interdependence that characterises sustainability and its concern with
population, pollution and economic growth against a backdrop of earth’s physical constraints. Its scope far exceeded the United Nations Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment that emerged in the same year because, rather than focusing on environmental issues, *Limits to Growth* was a plea to change the vision of global society. The authors focused on what they believed was the crux of problem: the seemingly benign notion of exponential growth, its unsustainability and the projected consequences for the world. They presented three conclusions:

1. If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years. The most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity.

2. It is possible to alter these growth trends and to establish a condition of ecological and economic stability that is sustainable far into the future. The state of global equilibrium could be designed so that the basic material needs of each person on the earth are satisfied and each person has an equal opportunity to realize his individual human potential.

3. If the world’s people decide to strive for this second outcome rather than the first, the sooner they begin working to attain it, the greater will be their chances of success. (Meadows et al. 1972:23)

Based on these conclusions, Meadows et al. argued that the great challenge for humanity is to try and live in a state of equilibrium. To do so, long-term existential goals take on prime importance and vision becomes paramount. The moral dimension is raised on a pedestal and notions of justice, equity and freedom for every person in countries of both the North and the South come to the fore. While Meadows et al. did not propose many specific solutions to the ‘world problematic’ they strongly advocated changes in global values, which they described as “a Copernican revolution of the mind” (Meadows et al. 1972:195), and new approaches that would lead human society beyond the narrow economic, technological and legalistic understanding of that time. The final sentences of *Limits to Growth* summarised the task ahead, which they described as:

> The last thought we wish to offer is that man must explore himself – his goals and values – as much as the world he seeks to change. The dedication to both tasks must be unending. The crux of the matter is not only whether the human species will survive, but even more whether it can survive without falling into a state of worthless existence. (Meadows et al. 1972:197)

*Limits to Growth* was not well received by established interests in science, business and government who chastised it as a prediction of doom and gloom (for example, see Cole & Freeman 1973). However, the warning of a possible disaster generated enormous interest around the world although it

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1 While providing the foundation for the concept of sustainability, *Limits to Growth* did not use the term ‘sustainability’ preferring to describe the conditions of “ecological and economic stability that is sustainable” (Meadows et al. 1972:24).
would be several years before the term ‘sustainability’ would be used to describe the ideas in *Limits to Growth*.

In 1981, Lester Brown’s *Building a Sustainable Society* was one of the first books to use the term ‘sustainability’ in his outline of the problems facing the world, the solutions to those problems and the shape of a more ideal society. For Brown, an agriculturist, population and food security were the key issues and he strongly advocated stabilisation of the population through various socio-economic means and the preservation of the ecological bases for food production. While he did not define ‘sustainability’, Brown (1981) generated an expansive list of ideas of what might constitute a sustainable society including the use of renewal energy, innovative forms of industries, new patterns of urbanisation and transport, re-emergence of agriculture, and a move toward a lifestyle of simplicity and self-reliance. His work is notable because its comprehensive scope touched on challenges now taken for granted such as economic reorientation, institutional change, transformation of values and theology.

Other works that emerged in that era included the conservation approach of *How to Save the World* (Allen 1980) based on the *World Conservation Strategy* (IUCN 1980), the quasi-Marxist social perspective of *The Environment: From Surplus to Scarcity* (Schnaiberg 1980), William Ophuls’ political rendering in *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity* (1977) and Johan Galtung’s (1978) work on ‘eco-development’ and ‘technology for self-reliance’.

In the international arena, the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment in 1972 led to the founding of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). However, it was not until the 1984-1987 hearings of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) that sustainability emerged on the global political platform, ironically, as a metamorphosis of the growth agenda known as ‘sustainable development’.

### 2.2 The Rise and Decline of Sustainable Development

In 1984 the United Nations appointed the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), under the leadership of Gro Harlem Brundtland, to examine ways of dealing with the tension between environmental and development problems. The resulting report, *Our Common Future*, identified the compromise as ‘sustainable development’ defining it as “development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the needs of the future” (WCED 1987:43). Contrary to the message of *Limits to Growth*, the Commission stated:

> We see instead the possibility for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base.
And we believe that such growth to be absolutely essential to relieve the great poverty that is deepening in much of the developing world. (WCED 1987:1)

For the Commission, sustainability was not about equilibrium but about sustainable economic development to ensure a minimum growth rate for countries to meet the ‘essential needs’ of their populations. To confirm its economic position, the Commission stated: “The most basic of all needs is for a livelihood: that is, employment” (WCED 1987:54). To achieve this growth, it prescribed solutions of changing the ‘quality of growth’, conservation of resources, and technological innovations which is regarded as the “key link between humans and nature” (WCED 1987:60).

At the follow-up United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, sustainable development became an issue at the forefront of international politics. There, the principles of sustainable development as recommended by the WCED were ratified in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (UNCED 1992). The Declaration enunciated four themes central in this debate:

1. Conservation:
In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.

2. Poverty reduction:
All States and all people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, in order to decrease the disparities in standards of living and better meet the needs of the majority of the people of the world.

3. The needs of the most vulnerable:
The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries.

4. International cooperation:
States should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation. Trade policy measures for environmental purposes should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade. Unilateral actions to deal with environmental challenges outside the jurisdiction of the importing country should be avoided. Environmental measures addressing transboundary or global environmental problems should, as far as possible, be based on an international consensus.

While laudable in many ways, these principles restricted the scope of sustainable development in at least three ways. Firstly, they established sustainable development as part of the global (conventional) development process with recognition of the importance of environmental protection. Secondly,
saw poverty reduction as the most pressing concern but seemed to emphasise environmental problems as predominantly associated with poor countries that must be helped. Thirdly, they endorsed free trade as an integral means for achieving sustainable development while virtually prohibiting any nation from taking action on global environmental issues less it interfered with trade.

With the Declaration came Agenda 21, the Programme of Action for Environment and Development. This consisted of four sections on economic and social dimensions, resource conservation and management, strengthening the roles of groups involved in sustainable development, and means of implementation. In keeping with the Declaration, Agenda 21 outlined a variety of objectives such as “enabling all people to achieve sustainable livelihoods”, the promotion of sustainable production and consumption, strengthening national institutions to protect forests, building partnerships between governments and non-governmental organisations, and supporting local initiatives known as “local Agenda 21” (UN 1992:n.p.).

Building on the political consensus of 1992, sustainable development emerged conceptually in much of the literature as the balance between economic, environmental and social objectives (Barbier 1987; Giddings, Hopwood & O’Brien 2002; Goodland 1995; Hart 1999; Holmberg 1991; Sadler 1987). Figure 2.1 is a typical representation of sustainable development.

![Figure 2.1: Sustainable development as the intersection of economy, society and environment](image-url)
David Munro (1995), who was responsible for *Caring for the Earth* (IUCN/UNEP/WWF 1991), the update of *World Conservation Strategy* (IUCN 1980), uses this model to define the three pillars of sustainable development where:

- ecological sustainability concerns keeping within the limits of the supporting ecosystems and its carrying capacity.
- social sustainability involves preserving social stability and norms “within a pattern of gradual evolution” (p.33).
- economic sustainability entails upholding the circumstances that allow economic benefits to exceed production and environmental costs.

Sustainable development therefore entails a reconciliation of the three objectives. Although this conception of sustainable development is common and used in government policies (for example, Envrions Australia 1999; TEI 2000), the literature also frequently points to a simpler form of discourse where sustainable development is truncated to focus purely on the interaction between the economy and the environment. Social aspects are often neglected or given much less attention probably because of the elusive nature of understanding and measuring social sustainability (Cuthill 2008; McKenzie 2004). The unequal status accorded to social sustainability may also reflect the stance derived from the negotiated ‘settlement’ between the industrialist political establishment and the environmental movement at the Rio Summit (Dresner 2002).

From 1992 onwards, sustainable development continued its prominence as a key theme in many United Nations conferences, including:

- World Conference on Human Rights, 1993
- International Conference on Population and Development, 1994
- World Summit for Social Development, 1995
- Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995
- World Food Summit, 1996

These conferences increased the emphasis on social issues and had the effect of producing a more balanced approach to sustainable development than had been forged at UNCED. The culmination of these international dialogues was the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. The ensuing action-oriented Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Figure 2.2) can be considered ‘international goals for sustainable human development’ (UNESCO 2001).
The thrust of the MDGs is the alleviation of global poverty and inequality using concrete, achievable targets (Paluzzi & Farmer 2005). The MDGs can also be viewed as an attempt to move the world towards a basic level of sustainability and, as such, are important instruments for sustainable development. However, aside from the MDGs’ questionable relevance in the international political arena dominated by security and trade issues and the highly technocratic nature of the MDG process (Harcourt 2005), the MDGs’ approach shows little signs of deviating from the growth agenda of the WCED and Rio Declaration. As the UN (2001:18-19) states:

In order to significantly reduce poverty and promote development it is essential to achieve sustained and broad-based economic growth. The millennium development goals highlight some of the priority areas that must be addressed to eliminate extreme poverty. These goals include commitments made by developed nations, such as increased official development assistance (ODA) and improved market access for exports from developing countries.

In other words, the MDGs advocate a conventional development path based on foreign aid and economic expansion in order to alleviate poverty which was created, or at least exacerbated, by the same development path in the first place.

Two years later in 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), the ten-year follow-up to UNCED, was held in Johannesburg. In contrast to UNCED, the term ‘sustainable development’ was prominent in the conference title demonstrating worldwide acceptance of the concept. The political declaration that emerged formally recognised the three social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development (UN 2002). In addition, the declaration adopted poverty, social inequity and globalisation, in the context of continued environmental degradation, as the core issues of sustainable development as stated in these paragraphs:
11. We recognize that poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns and protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development are overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development.

12. The deep fault line that divides human society between the rich and the poor and the ever-increasing gap between the developed and developing worlds pose a major threat to global prosperity, security and stability.

14. Globalization has added a new dimension to these challenges. The rapid integration of markets, mobility of capital and significant increases in investment flows around the world have opened new challenges and opportunities for the pursuit of sustainable development. But the benefits and costs of globalization are unevenly distributed, with developing countries facing special difficulties in meeting this challenge. (UN 2002:n.p.)

The strong involvement of civil society was also a notable feature of WSSD. NGOs from around the world participated in the conference (unlike in Rio where they were excluded). As a result, over 250 so-called ‘type 2’ partnerships between businesses, NGOs and governments were announced to address sustainable development on a voluntary basis (Yamin & Depledge 2005). An example of these partnerships was the high-profile partnership between Greenpeace and World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD) to tackle climate change (Mehta 2003). These partnerships provided hope for extending implementation of sustainable development beyond governmental arenas.

However, despite these achievements, the WSSD Plan of Implementation was short on practical details. For many, the Plan was anything but implementable lacking specifics and priorities. As Hulse (2007:91) comments:

The absence of precise definitions, any logical sequence of precise priorities, an estimate of the probable time required and cost of each proposed development programme, collectively render the proposals virtually impossible of effective implementation.

Rather, the plan was seen as “a regurgitation of virtually every recommendation and suggestion” from all participants “together with a repetition of issues raised by many conferences and commissions that preceded Johannesburg” (Hulse 2007:91) and thus “too weak to offer anything meaningful” (Mehta 2003:127).

Type 2 partnerships were also viewed suspiciously by NGOs because of the absence of concrete targets. With the exceptions of a pledge on access to sanitation and some progress on biodiversity, fisheries management and toxic chemicals usage, there were no new targets in the Plan of Implementation (Burg 2003). Perhaps this was not surprising given that the original targets set at UNCED had not been achieved but many people were cynical of the influence of the business sector who pushed for the ‘privatization’ of sustainable development (Hoedeman 2002), that is to say, taking sustainable
development out of the international arena where binding multilateral agreements could ensure accountability into the unregulated space of private partnerships between businesses and stakeholders. As a result, and despite providing an unprecedented space for networking, WSSD was viewed by environmentalists and NGOs as a great disappointment (Burg 2003) and “a step backward from Rio” (Mehta 2003:127).

Since WSSD, sustainable development has been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as “the overarching framework for UN activities, in particular for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the United Nations Millennium Declaration” (UN 2002:2). However, in the wake of the 2001 World Trade Center bombings in New York and the polarisation that occurred at WSSD, the eminence of sustainable development in international political discourse has been significantly undermined (Harcourt 2002). Security now appears to be the dominant agenda, with its emphasis on exclusion. The ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality of the security agenda contrasts markedly with the participatory ideal of sustainable development (Pronk 2004). This turn of events at the beginning of the millennium is sobering for a world under increasing population pressure and threatened by ecological and social turmoil.

2.3 Critique of Sustainable Development

The major critique of sustainable development centres on its assumptions about the importance of economic growth. As Herman Daly (1973:151) states:

Growthmania is the attitude in economic theory that begins with the theological assumption of infinite wants, and then with infinite hubris goes on to presume that the original sin of infinite wants has its redemption vouchsafed by the omnipotent savior of technology, and that the first commandment is to produce more and more goods for more and more people, world without end.…

Environmental degradation is an iatrogenic disease induced by economic physicians who treat the basic malady of unlimited wants by prescribing unlimited economic growth.

At least five arguments have been made against economic growth. Firstly, growth assumes that the human economy is divorced from the ecological world. This leads to the presumption that growth can go on forever because growth has become self-perpetuating and is unbounded by any earthly constraint. However, Daly (1973) argues that this is not so:

The world is finite, the ecosystem is a steady state. The human economy is a subsystem of the steady-state ecosystem. Therefore at some level and over some time period the subsystem must also become a steady state, at least in its physical dimensions of people and physical wealth. The steady-state economy is therefore a physical necessity. (p.153)
Thus, Daly bases his argument on the physical laws of nature to dispel conventional economic beliefs. Growth cannot continue forever because sooner or later it will come up against the physical limits of the earth. This means that sustainability should be about a steady-state rather than about perpetual growth. Critics of sustainable development have therefore dubbed sustainable development as the ‘growth of limits’ rather than ‘limits to growth’ (Costanza & Daly 1992; Willers 1994).

Secondly, growth has long been intertwined with attempts to improve society’s lot to such an extent that it has become axiomatic in the West (Costanza & Daly 1992; Plant 1995; Redclift 1992; Rees 1998). To question it is to undermine the basic tenet of social progress since the Enlightenment and to undermine the idea of human omnipotence over nature. However, there is mounting evidence against the claim that growth is synonymous with increased well-being. For example, data from the United States show that while per capita income has doubled in real terms since 1957, happiness has actually declined (Figure 2.3).

![Figure 2.3: Average US real income versus happiness (Myers 2003)](image)

As Myers (2003) asserts, doubling the affluence of Americans has not led to rising levels of happiness but to a myriad of negative side-effects such as the doubling of violent crimes, divorces, teen suicides and escalating mental depression. He concludes that material progress has actually undermined the human spirit of Americans rather than enhanced it:

I call this soaring wealth and shrinking spirit “the American paradox”. More than ever, we have big houses and broken homes, high incomes and low morale, secured rights and diminished civility. We excel at making a living but often fail at making a life. We celebrate our prosperity but yearn for purpose. We cherish our freedoms but long for connection. In an age of plenty, we feel spiritual
hunger. These facts of life explode a bombshell underneath our society’s materialism: *Economic growth has provided no boost to human morale.* (Myers 2003:205-206 - stress in original)

This finding is confirmed in other countries. For example, the United Kingdom shows the same trend: a near doubling of economic output measured in GDP has produced no corresponding increase in well-being (Figure 2.4).

![Figure 2.4: UK life satisfaction and GDP 1973–2002 (Shah & Marks 2004)](image)

Thus, Easterlin (1995) identifies a sufficiency threshold where basic needs are being met, but above which increased income does not increase happiness. Beyond this threshold, psychological factors such as the human capacity for adaptation\(^2\) and the desire to compare\(^3\) negate any gain in income (Myers 2003; Shah & Peck 2005). Other factors, such as relationships with family and community, can also be more important to happiness, with income being useful only in so far as it helps achieve such goals (Camfield, Choudhury & Devine 2006). This means that people in very poor countries, such as Bangladesh for example, can actually experience a higher level of happiness than people in much richer countries. These findings directly undermine conventional economic wisdom and suggest a re-thinking of the utilitarianism on which it is founded.

A third problem with economic growth is its role as a major cause of environmental degradation (Daly & Goodland 1996; Daly & Townsend 1993). Excessive consumption of resources in the North has been the primary driver of climate change, probably the single most important threat to earth’s ecological integrity (Gore 2006; IPCC 2007), and the per capita ecological footprint of Northerners remains significantly higher than that of the rest of the world (WWF 2000; 2006). The WCED’s arguments that

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\(^2\) People adapt to gain in income and the new level becomes the ‘normal’ standard henceforth.

\(^3\) People compare their income level with that of others especially the most successful.
sustainable development was for the poor who were the prime cause of environmental degradation and that growth in the North was needed to spur growth in the South now seem tenuous.

Fourthly, social inequality has also followed growth. As Thai social critic, Sivaraksa (2007:89-90), laments:

Economic growth brings with it great danger such as ecological disaster and increasing income disparity. In New York City, Noam Chomsky reports that nearly 60% of black youth lack economic and educational opportunity, have no access to even the most basic social services and little sense of security. Their plight is not significantly different from the inhabitants of Bangladesh. Similar situations are present in Europe. The BBC recently reported that the living conditions of some poor children in London are comparable to those that Charles Dickens wrote of in the 19th century.

A root cause of these social problems is that growth entails globalisation which has been described as “the process of enclosing the commons and thus dispossessing and disempowering people” (Reason 2002:22). In other words, globalisation allocates rights to what were once common properties to those with capital and technology thus depriving the poor and fuelling poverty. Environmental degradation further compounds the issue and results in massive migration to urban centres, which places even more stress on social systems (Cobb 1995; Doyle 1998).

Fifthly, sustainable development may be seen as the epitome of Western developmentalism whose consecration at UNCED put environmentalism on a pedestal (Sachs 1999). As such, sustainable development has been described as a race in which “the South has no intention of abandoning the Northern model of living as its implicit Utopia” and, consequently, “the South is incapable of escaping the North’s cultural hegemony, for development without hegemony is like a race without a direction” (Sachs 1999:31).

The Western concept of development can be traced to the Eurocentric view of social order and progress found in the writings of Adam Smith, Saint-Simon, Comte and John Stuart Mill (Cowen & Shenton 1995). However, Sachs (1999) argues that its modern incarnation began with President Harry Truman’s articulation of a new ‘anti-colonial imperialism’ worldview which divided the world into ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’. In this view, the West assumes trusteeship (Cowen & Shenton 1995; 1996) and the great diversity of cultures is collapsed into one category, ‘the poor’, which is judged on such criteria as GDP per capita and calorific intake while whole traditions of living based on sufficiency are neglected. The ‘natural’ solution to poverty defined through such statistical operations is growth. However, as Guha and Martinez-Alier (1997:75) argue:
The illusion of continued economic growth is encouraged by the world’s rich to maintain peace among the poor. But the truth is that unchecked economic growth leads to the exhaustion of resources and to pollution, and this harms the poor. There is thus a conflict between the destruction of nature to make money and the conservation of nature in order to live. The survival of the poor is not guaranteed by the expansion of the market system; on the contrary, their survival is threatened by its expansion.

Thus, from this perspective, there is a strong element of neo-colonialism in sustainable development. With the growth agenda serving the materialist agenda of Western powers, scarcity is seen as an economic invention only applicable when a culture is “continually testing the limits of nature” (Sachs 1999:52). As Sachs argues, sustainable development, conceived on the tenets of growth and management of scarcities, can never fulfill its mission:

Certainly, interpreting the state of the world chiefly in terms of ‘resources’, ‘management’ and ‘efficiency’ may appeal to planners and economists. But it continues to promote development as a cultural mission and to shape the world in the image of the West…. The more their language is adopted around the globe, the more difficult it will be to see nature in terms of respect and not as a resource, society in terms of the common good and not of production, and action in terms of virtue and not of efficiency. To put it in a nutshell: such reports promote the sustainability of nature and erode the sustainability of cultures. And this, for sure, will not benefit nature either. (Sachs 1999:55)

### 2.4 Alternative Approach to Sustainability: Principles and Characteristics

While sustainable development as an international development platform has floundered and its central tenet of economic growth undermined, the alternative approach - known here simply as ‘sustainability’ because of the close philosophical ties with the original idea of sustainability as embodied in *Limits to Growth* - has continued to flourish despite being ignored by governments (Korten 2005a). This section documents the principles of sustainability that diverge significantly from the concept of sustainable development. Two complementary perspectives highlight these principles: Orr’s ‘ecological sustainability’ (1992) and Korten’s ‘alternative wisdom’ (2005b).

Orr differentiates between two versions of sustainability: ‘technological sustainability’ (Orr’s term for mainstream sustainable development) and ‘ecological sustainability’ (Table 2.1). Technological sustainability concerns “becom[ing] sustainable within the modern paradigm through better technologies and more accurate prices” while ecological sustainability necessitates a “transition to a postmodern world” that rises above current ways of thinking (Orr 1992:24). Technological sustainability rests on the foundation of science as the ability to mold nature to human desire. In

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4 Korten’s article was originally written in 1993, roughly the same time as Orr’s.
contrast, ecological sustainability does not view humans as infallible but, rather, as limited in capacity to deal with things beyond a certain scale. This then fosters a sense humility and acceptance rather than ambition. A second difference concerns technological sustainability’s portrayal of humans as ‘economic man’ with unlimited desires as derived from reductionist sciences of economics, sociobiology and behavioural psychology (Orr 1992). Ecological sustainability rejects such a pessimistic view of humans in favour of “an active, informed, competent citizenry” bounded by ethics and responsibilities, and, thus, capable of making the shift towards sustainability (Orr 1992:31). A third difference concerns technological sustainability’s fixation on growth and reliance on technology. This differs from ecological sustainability’s emphasis on diversity of knowledge that is inclusive of traditional wisdoms and practices, a sense of spirituality and connection with the earth, and new designs that replicate the efficiency and resilience found in nature. Ecological sustainability encourages discovery and rediscovery, and has little faith in growth for its own sake. A final difference concerns the approach to achieving sustainability. Since the foundation of technological sustainability is the belief in human’s control over nature, its approach is top-down and technocratic; that is, sustainability can best be achieved when economists and experts set the right policies. Ecological sustainability refutes such conceit preferring a decentralised, small-scale approach that stresses holism and the interrelatedness of people, society and nature.

Table 2.1: The two meanings of sustainability according to Orr (1992)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Technological Sustainability (Sustainable Development)</th>
<th>Ecological Sustainability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humanity’s role</strong></td>
<td>• Domination of nature through management and technology</td>
<td>• Acceptance of fallibility of human nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Model of humans</strong></td>
<td>• Economic man with narrow self-interest to be served by maximising consumption without limits</td>
<td>• Citizenry, responsibility, civic virtues beginning in local communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainability path</strong></td>
<td>• Economic growth is the primary vehicle</td>
<td>• Rediscovery of traditional knowledge connected to place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technology as the means of achieving growth</td>
<td>• Local-scale economies loosely connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Replication of structure and function of natural systems in human design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Diversity in everything to ensure resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to solving unsustainability</strong></td>
<td>• Managerial, technocratic, top-down approach through policy, pricing, technology, etc.</td>
<td>• Decentralised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Large scale, homogeneity</td>
<td>• Small scale to simplify management and encourage ethical behaviour and responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reductionist, fragmented science</td>
<td>• Holistic, interrelatedness, whole systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complimentary to Orr’s view of ecological sustainability, Korten (2005b) provides a pragmatic perspective that sees sustainability as an ‘alternative wisdom’ to the ‘conventional wisdom’ of
sustainable development. This alternative wisdom shifts the goal of development from growth to creating:

1. sustainable economies that equitably meet human needs without extracting resource inputs or expelling wastes in excess of the environment’s regenerative capacity; and

2. sustainable human institutions that assure both security and opportunity for social, intellectual, and spiritual growth. (Korten 2005b:66)

This perspective is a refutation of the growth theorem where the focus is shifted towards the well-being of people and society within ecological limits. Alternative wisdom then addresses the flaws of conventional wisdom by proposing a number of solutions (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2: Summary of principles and means of conventional wisdom and alternative wisdom (Korten 2005b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Conventional Wisdom</th>
<th>Alternative Wisdom</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics</strong></td>
<td>• Growth as only means</td>
<td>• Meeting needs equitably within ecological limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Institutions to allow social, intellectual and spiritual growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifestyles</strong></td>
<td>• Less consumption equates to poverty</td>
<td>• Life is about quality and not quantity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **How to help poor countries achieve sustainability** | • Sustainable growth will address environment problems  
  • Free trade               | • Resource should be available to meet local needs first                             |
|                           |                                                                                     | • Developing institutional and technical capacity to meet these needs efficiently and sustainably |
|                           |                                                                                     | • North should reduce consumption and transfer sustainable technology               |
| **Cause of environmental problems** | • The poor  
  • Hence, raising income of the poor through growth will reduce environmental problems | • Northern population and the wealthy through overconsumption                        |
|                           |                                                                                     | • Inequity the cause of environmental degradation hence redistribution of resource is an imperative |
| **World population**      | • Population will stabilise naturally at 12 to 15 billion  
  • Any strains dealt through growth | • Population will stabilise well below 12 billion because of social and ecological disasters |
| **Economic management**   | • Policy to maximise efficiency in allocation of financial resources                | • Internalisation of all costs to ensure ecological integrity, social equity and efficiency in meeting human needs |
| **Jobs**                  | • Created from economic growth                                                      | • Redefinition based on sustainable livelihood and sustainable production          |
| **Trade and environment** | • Free trade facilitates efficiency, hence improvement in environment               | • Trade only useful when comparative advantage real. Free trade often results in externalisation of environmental and social costs |
| **Markets and governments** | • Market intervention discouraged  
  • Privatisation leads to the most efficiency                                        | • Market interventions necessary because of market inadequacies \  
  • Governments must ensure full accounting of all costs, fair competition and provision of adequate public goods |
On lifestyle, alternative wisdom supports the reduction in per capita consumption especially for high consumers. Reduction of consumption should not be regarded as going backward but as an opportunity to improve the quality of personal and community life. On reducing poverty in poor countries, alternative wisdom believes that “[e]nvironmental problems are in large part a consequence of northern [sic] countries exporting their ecological deficits to the South through trade and investment” to service their overconsumption (Korten 2005b:66). Thus, Northern countries should reduce consumption and facilitate beneficial technological transfer. These measures would help Southern countries achieve sustainability through: 1) increasing the quantity and quality of sustainable natural resource flows to meet basic needs; and 2) through institutional building and capacity building to ensure equity in distribution of resources. On the cause of environmental problems, alternative wisdom blames Northerners and the wealthy for their overconsumption which deprives the poor of sustainable livelihoods. Thus, the elimination of inequity through redistribution of resources is regarded as “a fundamental condition of sustainability” (Korten 2005b:67). On world population, alternative wisdom believes that, in absence of major policy changes, the number will be significantly lower than currently projected by conventional wisdom because of social and ecological strive. On the goals of economic management, alternative wisdom sees the key issues as: the scale of resource use within the regenerative capacity of the environment, fair distribution of resources, and efficiency in meeting basic needs. On jobs, alternative wisdom favours a new meaning, as Korten (2005b:68) writes:

We must begin to think in terms of providing people with sustainable livelihoods based on sustainable production for sustainable markets to support sustainable lifestyles. There is a great deal of useful, environmentally friendly work that needs to be done that could readily eliminate involuntary unemployment if we chose to fund it. Furthermore, in most instances sustainable production methods and technologies provide more livelihood opportunities than do their more resource extravagant alternatives.

Thus, alternative wisdom challenges the idea that employment can only be created through growth. Alternative wisdom also advocates a fair and balanced system of trade where all costs, including social and environmental costs, are internalised. It believes that trade should only occur when there are real comparative advantages between nations or localities. In this way, alternative wisdom believes that governments should regulate markets to ensure: 1) the full internalisation of all costs, 2) fair competition, 3) a just distribution of benefits, and 4) the provision of adequate public goods. Finally, alternative wisdom contends that the misplaced faith in conventional wisdom and its tenuous assumptions is the most formidable obstacle to sustainability, as Korten (2005b:69) states:

The conventional wisdom represents an ideology, not a science, and largely contradicts both the theoretical foundations of market economics and empirical experience - which contrary to the claims of the conventional wisdom strongly favours the alternative wisdom. Indeed, the conventional wisdom may itself be the single greatest barrier we face to progress toward sustainability.
The two perspectives of Korten and Orr help to identify key characteristics of sustainability and the path towards it. Orr’s concept of ecological sustainability provides a set of ideals or vision of sustainability based on new philosophies and fundamentals of the human relationship between one another and nature. Korten’s alternative wisdom is more of an operational framework for moving towards sustainability. It can be regarded as a set of market-based initiatives derived from a shift in value from growth to well-being and equity. As such, it is appropriate for the short and intermediate terms when the world will require some stability during the transition period from neo-liberal market economics to a new sustainable, post-industrial paradigm.

The characteristics and means described by Orr and Korten can be placed within a set of five principles that encapsulates the meaning of sustainability. These five principles proposed by Ben-Eli (2007) are:

1. The Spiritual Domain
2. The Domain of Life
3. The Social Domain
4. The Economic Domain
5. The Material Domain

The spiritual domain concerns attitudes and ethical views necessary for a sustainable world. According to Ben-Eli (2007), this involves the three values-based actions of: (i) honouring the intricate ecology of earth; (ii) fostering ethics and compassion in all human activities, especially through a sense of sacredness and reverence in all people-nature interactions; and (iii) linking personal and social transformation. Ben-Eli argues that, together, these can support “the emergence of a genuine, wise, planetary civilisation” (p.14). He also argues that the spiritual domain is the key to sustainability because: “It alone underscores the difference between a greedy, egocentric, predatory orientation and a nurturing, self-restrained approach to the world” (p.14).

The domain of life guides human behaviour in relation to other species. It strongly values complexity and diversity of ecosystems, including industrial economies, because these characteristics are regarded as providing the resilience needed to cope with change.

The social domain concerns human to human interactions. It articulates “maximising degrees of freedom and potential self-realisation of all humans” so that the values of non-violent resolution of conflict, respect for all cultures, communities and individual rights and fair access to resources are integral to all decision-making.
The economic domain offers a framework for a new economics. It promotes full cost pricing of environmental services, market interventions, and a recognition of well-being in economic accounting.

Finally, the material domain guides the use of material and energy. It supports an acceptance of limits as determined by “primary laws of physics” so that resources are used “consciously and creatively” with maximum efficiency, and waste minimised or eliminated (p.14).

In summary, the key principles of sustainability, derived from Orr, Korten and encapsulated in Ben-Eli’s domains are: spirituality, diversity and resilience, freedom and equity, economics of well-being that accounts for the earth’s services, and ecoefficiency in deference to natural limits.

2.5 Systemic Approach to Sustainability

Another key characteristic of sustainability is a systemic approach to understanding and solving problems. As Ben-Eli (2007) emphasises, the five domains of sustainability should be viewed as interrelated and understood together as ‘a coherent whole’. Several other authors also advocate a systemic approach to sustainability (AtKisson 1999; Bossel 1999; Gilman 1990; Hardi, Zdan & IISD 1997; Hart 1999; Meadows 1999a; b). This section outlines the meaning of a systemic approach with an emphasis on Donella Meadows’ framework for sustainability.

The key difference between a systemic approach and others (such as the thematic approach of sustainable development) is a focus on subsystems in a hierarchy, complex interrelationships, feedback loops and information flows. A systemic approach uses the methodology of system dynamics\(^5\) to facilitate “understanding the unfolding of behaviour over time of whole systems” (Meadows 1999a:28 – stress in original). According to Meadows (1989), some of the key principles in system thinking are:

1. Everything is connected to everything else.
2. Systems are more than the sum of their parts; they are dominated by their inter-relationships and their purpose.
3. Systems are made up of interconnected stocks and flows.
4. Systems are organised into hierarchies, which means that everything is connected to everything else, but not equally strongly.
5. Natural systems are finely tuned, stable and resilient.

Stocks and flows are the key constituents of systems. For example, a renewable stock is a fish population while the flow consists of an inflow of newborn fish (rate of regeneration) and outflows of

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\(^5\) System dynamics was first developed by Jay W. Forrester at MIT in the 1960s.
natural deaths and fishing harvest. An example of a non-renewable stock is the amount of oil remaining in reserves. This is non-renewable because there is no inflow only an outflow of the amount being pumped out by oil wells (usually measured as a rate, for example, barrels per day). Stocks and flows can apply to many other things such as people, knowledge and pollutants.

Positive and negative feedback loops are the controlling mechanisms in a system. Positive feedback loops produce exponential growth which Meadows (1999a:30) defines as “growth that feeds on itself – the more you have, the more you get”. Some examples are human population growth, economic output and money bearing interest. Unchecked exponential growth can be very destabilising because it can overwhelm a system quickly; for example, a population growing at 3.5% will double in twenty years. Negative feedback loops dampen growth and keep a system in balance. Some examples are: a thermostat reducing heat output once a desired temperature is reached; the pancreas maintaining blood sugar levels; and predators controlling the size of a population of animals lower in the food chain.

Other characteristics of systems important for sustainability are resilience and nonlinearity (Meadows 1999a). The earth’s ecological systems are resilient because species biodiversity ensures balance among populations and provides a gene pool for evolution. Resilience is also supported by the existence of redundant subsystems that provide protection from disturbances. An example of this is the role of wetlands in absorbing floodwater. Ecological systems also act nonlinearly; that is, a system may function normally until a certain threshold is reached when it collapses. Examples include: the collapse of fishing catch once the breeding stock falls below a minimum level; climate change that could suddenly trigger change in ocean currents; and rising sea temperature that causes coral death once a certain level is breached.

An understanding of the principles and characteristics of a system can prevent system collapse and, thus, is necessary to its sustainability. A lack of such understanding underpins the present crisis of unsustainability in all systems that humans are involved with.

2.5.1 Meadows’ Framework for Sustainability

The work of Donella Meadows is among the most widely accepted systemic approaches to sustainability. The research she directed led to the publications of Limits to Growth (1972) and its sequel, Beyond the Limits (1992). These represent systemic approaches to analysing the state of the world using computer models. In 1999, Meadows developed a framework for sustainability based on Herman Daly’s pyramidal representation of the relationship between the satisfaction of human well-being and the earth’s resources through the use of intermediate means and intermediate ends (Figure
This model sees natural capital as the ultimate means for achieving the ultimate ends of human well-being. The transformation of natural capital through science and technology into built and human capital is the intermediate means of achieving human and social capital (intermediate ends) upon which well-being depends.

Natural capital (ultimate means) consists of both source capital and sink capital. Source capital provides inputs into the economy (for example, lumber from forest, fish from oceans, coal from the earth) while sink capital deals with waste outputs (for example, forest absorbs carbon dioxide, oceans absorb wastes, atmosphere disperses pollutants).

Built capital (intermediate means) is produced from natural capital through science and technology. Built capital is defined as the “physical stock of productive capacity of an economy” (Meadows 1999a).
A Brief Historical and Theoretical Overview of Sustainability Thinking

1999a:53). It includes such things as factories, tools, electricity generators and trucks, and, through the political economy, facilitates the creation of human capital and social capital.

Human capital is dependent on population size and structure but is also defined by population characteristics, for example, health and education. Social capital is the “stock of attributes (knowledge, trust, efficiency, honesty) that inheres not in a single individual, but to the human collectivity” (Meadows 1999a:61). Human capital can be viewed both as intermediate means because they are necessary for achieving well-being and as intermediate ends because health and education are desirable in themselves.

Lastly, the objective of any society is well-being, the ultimate ends. The importance of being able to recognise the constituents of well-being cannot be underestimated because:

If we can’t define what our ultimate ends are, how can we know whether we are approaching them, or with what efficiency, or even whether we’re going the right direction. (Meadows 1999a:66)

While conceptions of well-being are subjective and culture-bound, Meadows suggests that it is possible to come up with widely-accepted definitions of well-being. She cites Max-Neef’s (1991) scheme of ‘basic needs’ as an example. Thus, Meadows urges society to engage in participatory processes to generate better ways of understanding and measuring well-being as essential to sustainability because “[i]f the system orients itself around indicators that do not reflect real well-being, then it will produce whatever those indicators do measure (money flow, size of the economy, personal material possessions) rather than real well-being” (Meadows 1999a:66).

For Meadows (1999a:44), the key to sustainability is understanding the “logical relationship among the levels of the hierarchy”. She explains that sacrificing one form of capital for another is incompatible with sustainability:

Having plenty of material goods, health, and education does no good, if one does not know how to turn them into happiness and fulfillment. Having land, labor, capital, energy in abundance does not help, if the political and economic systems use them wastefully and inequitably. Having a bountiful earth is not enough, if there is no effective technology for harvesting the bounty. And, of course, having, technology, politics, economics, and ethics all in place does not help, if the foundation of the pyramid, the earth’s material, energy, and biological systems are not healthy. (Meadows 1989:23)

For Meadows, sustainability involves a holistic, balanced approach to integrating the top and bottom of the pyramid. This is necessary for ensuring the integrity of the system and maintaining all forms of capitals in the right proportion. However, she also points out that the pyramidal framework is conceptual and should not be taken entirely at face value. For example, the shape of the pyramid should
not be interpreted as conveying the idea that nature only serves humankind. Rather, the crucial idea is that the economy rests upon the supporting structure of nature and serves a nobler purpose. Thus, Meadows argues that the three ‘most basic’ tenets of sustainability are:

… the **sufficiency** with which ultimate ends are realized for all people, the **efficiency** with which ultimate means are translated into ultimate ends, and the **sustainability** of use of ultimate means… *In fact, it would be a primary goal for a sustainable society to produce the greatest possible ends with the least possible means.* (Meadows 1999a:45 - stress in original)

### 2.5.2 Leverage Points

The imperative of systems thinking is explained by Meadows in *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (Meadows 1999b) where she discusses the dynamics and the most effective ways of engendering change in a complex system. This paper proposes twelve leverage points starting with the *least* effective and moving down to the *most* effective (Figure 2.6).

In this scheme, the topmost leverage points are considered the weakest, that is, they produce the least change with regards to effort put in. For example, adjusting the constants or parameters in a system (e.g. tax rates or pollution standards) is unlikely to produce a significant change because the structure of the system remains the same. Similarly, changing the stock/flow structure (e.g. a road network structure) is also unlikely to produce a profound change given that physical structures can be difficult to change and requires much time, effort and money.

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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Constants, parameter, numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>The sizes of buffers and stabilising stocks relative to their flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Structure of material stocks and flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Strength of negative feedback loops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Gain around driving positive feedback loops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Structure of information flows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Rules of the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Goals of the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mindset or paradigm out of which the system - its goals, structure, rules, delays and feedback structure - arises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The power to transcend paradigms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.6: Places to intervene in a system (Meadows 1999b)
Goals of the system

Changing the goals of a system is one of the most powerful leverage points because it affects all the elements further down the list such as physical stocks, information flows and rules; these would have to change to conform with the new goals. The importance of goals can be understood through the example of an economy. The goal of a capitalist economy is to grow as fast as possible. This results in accelerating material flows through the economy which draw down levels of renewable and non-renewable resources and produce pollution. One can appreciate the power of changing goals by imagining what would happen if the goal of that economy became instead ‘to remain in a steady-state’ (Daly 1973) or ‘to provide sufficiency for living’ (UNDP 2007). Such an economy would behave completely differently as would all the subsystems and mechanisms within it.

Shifting paradigms

Shifting the paradigm of a system is even more powerful than changing its goals. The word ‘paradigm’ is defined by Meadows (1999b:17) as:

The shared idea in the minds of society, the great big unstated assumptions – unstated because unnecessary to state; everyone already knows them – constitute that society’s paradigm, or deepest set of beliefs about how the world works.

The unstated assumptions and beliefs in the ‘conventional wisdom’ (Korten 2005b) of the modernist paradigm reveal some of the causes of unsustainability:

Money measures something real and has real meaning (therefore people who are paid less are literally worth less). Growth is good. Nature is a stock of resources to be converted to human purpose. Evolution stopped with the emergence of Homo sapiens. One can “own” land. Those are just a few of the paradigmatic assumptions of our current culture, all of which have utterly dumfounded other cultures, who thought them not the least bit obvious. (Meadows 1999b:17-18)

Paradigms give rise to systems and everything in them. As Meadows explains:

Paradigms are the sources of systems. From them, from shared social agreements about the nature of reality, come systems goals and information flows, feedbacks, stocks, flows and everything else about systems. (Meadows 1999b:18)

Hence, changing a system’s paradigm – or what Meadows refers to as ‘paradigm shift’ - fundamentally changes the system. A paradigm shift can occur very quickly in the mind of an individual once

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6 This is my interpretation of the goal of Thailand’s sufficiency economy. Sufficiency economy is discussed further in Chapter 3.
assumptions are exposed. Changing the paradigm of society is much more difficult because people tend to hold on tightly to their fundamental beliefs. However, it can be done and is, in fact, how societies have evolved over time. Meadows based this assertion on Kuhn’s seminal work, *Structure of Scientific Revolution* (1962), where examples of paradigm shifts in history abound and where Kuhn describes the common strategy of directing attention to anomalies and failures of the prevailing paradigms as a way of dismantling them.

**Transcending paradigms**

Despite the power of shifting paradigms, Meadows argues that it is the *transcendence* of paradigms that is the ultimate key to sustainability. Transcending paradigms involves ‘letting go’ of the deepest personal beliefs about how the world works and understanding that these beliefs are merely limited ways of making sense of the world. In short, it is about realising that these beliefs do not constitute *truth*.

For Meadows, the act of transcending paradigms starts with each and everyone of us and, despite the uncertainties and fear of going into the unknown, can provide the impetus for fundamental system change:

> People who cling to paradigms (just about all of us) take one look at the spacious possibility that everything they think is guaranteed to be nonsense and pedal rapidly in the opposite direction. Surely there is no power, no control, no understanding, not even a reason for being, much less acting, in the notion or experience that there is no certainty in any worldview. But, in fact, everyone who has managed to entertain the idea, for a moment or for a lifetime, has found it to be the basis for radical empowerment. (Meadows 1999b:19)

By letting go of paradigms, we gain the freedom to explore other possibilities of joy and human purpose. This means that we can make changes in life more easily, abandoning unsustainable beliefs and behaviour while embracing sustainable alternatives. Transcending paradigms frees us from the shackles of worldviews that are often associated with unsustainability and provides the foundation for building a better world.

**2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed two approaches to achieving a sustainable world: sustainable development and sustainability. Sustainable development is described as little more than a metamorphosis of

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7 Meadows was influenced by her experience of modelling global systems as documented in the book, * Grooping in the Dark* (Meadows, Richardson & Bruckmann 1982). Modelling allowed her to remove herself from a particular system and critically examine every aspect of it. This is akin to shifting paradigm: one removes oneself from a particular set of beliefs to expose its assumptions and biases, so that a new one can be put in place.
conventional economic thinking underpinned by the idea of growth. Sustainable development found wide acceptance in the political mainstream during the last decade but its importance has been eroded in the wake of ethnic conflicts and security concerns. In contrast, sustainability represents a new vision of the world based on a set of alternative principles and a systemic approach to problem solving. It is gaining acceptance throughout the world fuelled by the continued failure of market economics in producing well-being and equity, and in addressing social problems and environmental degradation.

Donella Meadows’ framework for sustainability is one of the most comprehensive of its kind. This framework and the scheme of leverage points provide a conceptual pathway towards a sustainable world. This pathway encompasses all aspects of sustainability and provides a way of informing action. It is imbued with a sense of compassion and plurality, as Meadows and her co-authors of *Beyond the Limits* write:

> It is difficult to speak of or to practice love, friendship, generosity, understanding, or solidarity within a system whose rules, goals and information streams are geared for lesser human qualities. But we try, and we urge you to try. Be patient with yourself and others as you and they confront the difficulty of a changing world. Understand and empathize with inevitable resistance; there is some resistance, some clinging to the ways of unsustainability, within each of us. Include everyone in the new world. Everyone will be needed. Seek out and trust in the best human instincts in yourself and in everyone. (Meadows et al. 1992:234)

Meadows’ pathway contains a strong element of personal transformation. This element comes, in part, from Buddhism, the spiritual tradition that influenced her towards the end of her life. Many aspects of Buddhism can be found in her writings. For example, one idea of well-being at the top of the pyramidal framework for sustainability is the Buddhist notion of enlightenment (Figure 2.5). Enlightenment again appears in the scheme of leverage points and is described as a state of ‘Not Knowing’ where all paradigms are transcended (Meadows 1999b). Mindfulness, another key Buddhist idea, is also described as a state of “being wide awake to our inner feelings and outer surroundings, going more slowly and deliberately and peacefully, so we neither ignore messes nor get compulsive about them, but just patiently, joyously, create order and beauty in everything we do” (Meadows 1998:n.p.).

Meadows also seemed to have a strong affinity towards the Dalai Lama. The respect for him resulted in her adoption of his ideas for making the world a better place (Meadows 2000). These ideas are:

1. Cultivating peace in the mind
2. Developing an ethics of care and responsibility for others
3. Ridding the mind of negative emotions as a way towards a non-violent world

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8 This quotation comes from a light-hearted article in her newspaper column. The ‘messes’ refer to the untidy state of her house created by her housemates, but it is equally applicable to the unsustainable state of the present world.
4. Addressing global issues of inequities and lack of freedom
5. Caring for the environment
6. Tackling the population explosion

These ideas strike at the heart of issues in sustainability but also emphasise inner transformation as the basis for all action. Inner transformation is a concept often missing in Western discourses in sustainability but is strongly represented in Meadows’ pathway to sustainability. Hence, this pathway is used to place the findings of this study within the context of a move towards a sustainable world (Chapter 8). Since Buddhism was a major source of inspiration for Meadows in her life shaping her work on sustainability, Buddhism is the subject of the next chapter. This chapter examines the sustainable values within Buddhism.
CHAPTER 3: 
BUDDHISM AND SUSTAINABILITY

May I be a wishing jewel, a magic vase, 
Powerful mantras and great medicine. 
May I become a wish-fulfilling tree 
And a cow of plenty for the world. 

Just like space 
And the great elements such as earth, 
May I always support the life 
Of all the boundless creatures. 

And until they pass away from pain, 
May I also be the source of life 
For all the realms of varied beings 
That reach unto the ends of space. 

- Shantideva (2000:33)

3.1 Introduction

Meadows’ affinity towards Buddhism has been shared by a number of non-Buddhist authors (for example, Birch 1993; Brown 1981; Daniels 1988; Galtung 1993; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995; Schumacher 1973), demonstrating the broadening appeal of Buddhism to sustainability thinking. This chapter reviews the literature on the theoretical and practical contribution of Buddhism to the concept of sustainability.

Galtung (1993) has compared Buddhism with other major spiritual traditions in five spheres of human existence: world peace, social development, human enlightenment, nature balance and cultural adequacy. An important characteristic of Buddhism that impressed Galtung (1993) is its egalitarian nature which is built on the belief of the oneness of all things:

One basic reason why I myself have been so attracted to Buddhism can now be expressed in one formula: the quest for unity. Buddhism does not drive wedges. Buddhism is a religion in the most basic sense of the word, religio, a relinking with all that is, out here and in here. We are all in it. There is no chosen species, human beings, chosen over and above animals and the rest of nature, giving rise to cruelty to animals, to meatism, to destruction of nature. From the very beginning the unity with all life was proclaimed. (p.XX to XXI - stress in original)
Galtung concluded that Buddhist epistemology reflects “the type of thought, speech and action that could lead to higher levels of world peace, social development, human enlightenment and nature balance” (p.115-116). However, he cautioned that “whether that correspondence is made use of is another matter” (p.116). In other words, Buddhism has potentials but has yet to fulfill them in helping solve world problems.

This chapter analyses the contribution of Buddhist theories and practices to sustainability. In doing so, it continues the critique of sustainable development founded on economic growth as described in Chapter 2. This chapter is structured as a metaphorical funnel, starting at the macro level of philosophy, funnelling down to the micro level of Buddhist initiatives in everyday life and, finally, emerging with the specific aim of the research. Although Buddhist literature rarely focuses on systemic sustainability, a wealth of information exists on Buddhist perspectives and attempts to address specific areas or issues in sustainability. Thus, Section 3.2 reviews Buddhism’s philosophical outlook on ecology and society as the foundation of Buddhist views of life. As such, it provides the context for understanding the ethos of Buddhism in sustainability. Section 3.3 examines the theory of Buddhist economics. Buddhist economics is Buddhism’s most significant contribution to the sustainability discourse at the theoretical level because it provides an alternative to conventional economics which lies at the heart of unsustainability. Section 3.4 highlights two Buddhist development paradigms as examples of radically different approaches to development. These Bhutanese and Thai examples are national approaches that have gained worldwide attention. Section 3.5 examines initiatives in sustainable living at the local level. These initiatives have appeared in both the West and the East and demonstrate how communities have turned to Buddhism for inspiration. Section 3.6 focuses on personal attempts to change and live more sustainably through Buddhism. It finds little empirical evidence, despite numerous claims in the literature, to suggest that Buddhism has affected the re-orientation of worldviews and behaviour towards sustainability. The concept of ‘personal sustainability’ as developed by this researcher is also forwarded. Lastly, Section 3.7 is the end of the metaphorical funnel and describes the research aim as emerging from the literature review of Buddhism and sustainability. It forwards four research questions to aid exploration of the research aim and explains how these were derived.

3.2 Buddhist Foundation for Sustainability: Ecological and Social Outlook

This section explores the ecological and social outlook of Buddhism as the philosophical platform for sustainability in this study. It begins with the Buddhist view of nature and finishes with the Buddhist view of social ethics.
3.2.1 The Ecological Outlook of Buddhism

Overall, Buddhism provides a human-nature philosophy that is well-suited to the concept of sustainability. Theravada Buddhism draws inspiration from traditional accounts in early Buddhism for relating with nature. Firstly, nature is viewed as a source of beauty and happiness conducive to spiritual development (de Silva 2000; de Silva 1990; Kabilsingh 1990b; P.A. Payutto 1992; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995). This reverence is reinforced by major events in the life of the Buddha that occurred in the wilderness (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1993; de Silva 2000; P.A. Payutto 1992). Secondly, the Buddha taught an attitude of respect for all life, as enshrined in the first precept of non-killing of living creatures (Henning 2002). This respect rests on a foundation of compassion and the understanding that all humans and animals share existence within the cycle of rebirths enduring both happiness and suffering (de Silva 2000; Kabilsingh 1990b; Martin 2000; P.A. Payutto 1987; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995). Lastly, a culture of frugality and resource conservation has been a hallmark of the Buddhist monastic order. Frugality is reflected in practices such as the multiple use of robes until they are completely destroyed and the protection of trees, plants, grass areas and waterways (de Silva 2000).

In Mahayana Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra and the Hua-yen Sutra\(^1\) provide Buddhist frameworks for the perception of ecology (Kaza & Kraft 2000). For example, the Lotus Sutra calls the teaching of the Buddha ‘Dharma rain’, compares the different ability for spiritual attainment of beings to different types of trees, and extols the virtues of those who seek to help others. Likewise, the Hua-yen Sutra praises those undertaking the path of the bodhisattva whose dedication is to serve all sentient beings in whatever form or shape. The Hua-yen Sutra also associates the elements in nature with the oneness of truth in all buddhas and thus promotes the idea of Dharmadhatu (dharma nature).\(^2\) In the Sixth Century, Tu-shun used this idea to describe the universe as the Jeweled Net of Indra (Kaza & Kraft 2000). Each jewel in this Net reflects all the other jewels simultaneously and entering one jewel is akin to entering all the other jewels (Figure 3.1). No jewel can be considered separate because all jewels are part of each other. Tu-shun’s concept has been influential in Mahayana writings such as Kukai’s Zen environmental paradigm in the Ninth Century (Ingram 1997), Dogen’s assertion that all things are, in the final rendering, the body of the Buddha and thus sacred (Parkes 1997) and, more recently, Gary Snyder’s concept of nature as a community (Barnhill 1997).

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1 Canonical scriptures in Buddhism are referred to as sutra.

2 Dharma nature is similar to the concept of Buddha nature as found in other schools of Mahayana Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.
Some of the most well-known contemporary interpretations of Buddhist ecology are the works of Payutto (1992; 1994b) and Buddhadasa (1971; 1990a) from the Theravada tradition, and Thich Nhat Hahn (2000a; 2002) from the Mahayana tradition.

As described in Chapter 1, Payutto regards the present environmental problems as the result of Western worldviews that see humans as separate from nature and each others, and humans as deriving happiness from material accumulation (P.A. Payutto 1987; 1994b; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995). He believes that these constitute ‘wrong view’ (micachaditthi) and that ‘right view’ (sammaditthi) can lead to changes in life objectives and action. Right view starts with an attitude of gratitude and loyalty to nature appreciating its vital contribution to human well-being. He recounts that the Buddha frequently encouraged his followers to foster this attitude and encouraged them to reflect it with good deeds towards animals and plants (P.A. Payutto 1994b). Payutto gives particular emphasis to the cultivation of loving-kindness (metta) towards others because Buddhism states that everyone is part of the natural order sharing birth, old age, suffering and death. In this regard, we should act with goodwill and help living beings achieve a better existence. Rather than compete or cause harm, we should live harmoniously with other human beings, animals and plants and take action only when guided by reason and wisdom. Payutto also believes that nature should be regarded as a source of lifelong learning. Nature can improve the quality of our mind, help establish inner peace and promote concentration, wisdom and understanding of the dharma. Nature provides an environment for solitude, devoid of distractions and perfect for the development of mental calmness and purity (P.A. Payutto 1994b; Phra Dhammapitaka 1995).
In contrast to Payutto’s instrumental, ethical approach, Buddhadasa’s ecological hermeneutics is one of spiritual biocentrism based on the concept of *idappaccayata*\(^3\) or interdependence (Swearer 1997). *Idappaccayata* is an inescapable rubric of the universe and stipulates that all things – living and non-living - are utterly interrelated and hence inseparable (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1990b). Nature and humanity are one intertwined cooperative:

> The entire cosmos is a cooperative. The sun, the moon, and the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and the earth. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative. When we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering, and death, then we can build a noble, even a heavenly environment. If our lives are not based on this truth then we’ll perish. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in Swearer 1997:29)

This profound realisation of nature as ultimate interconnectedness that extends through our physical and mental existence is the basis for letting go of the idea of self. When we realise that our existence is the existence of nature and that there can be no separation, selfishness is uprooted. When our well-being *is* the well-being of nature, we cease to treat nature as something to be exploited or conquered.

Buddhadasa was influenced by Zen (Jackson 2003) and it is no surprise that numerous contemporary Mahayana writers strongly advocate the idea of interdependence as the basis of ecological ethics. Thich Nhat Hanh’s concept of ‘interbeing’ is a good example. In interbeing, we are not only interdependent with everything else in the world but we *are* everything else both animate and inanimate. Thich Nhat Hahn (2000b:85) reminds us of humanity’s intrinsically link with the evolutionary past of the earth and states:

> An oak tree is an oak tree. That is all an oak tree needs to do. If an oak tree is less than an oak tree, we will all be in trouble. In our former lives, we were rocks, clouds, and trees. We have also been an oak tree. This is not just Buddhism; it is scientific. We humans are a young species. We were plants, we were trees, and now we have become humans.

Thich Nhat Hanh’s idea of interbeing is drawn from Mahayana scriptures, for example, the *Avatamsaka Sutra* in which the Buddha explained the idea of ‘interpenetration’ – how time, space, life and phenomena are so closely conjoined as to interpenetrate each other. However, according to Thich Nhat Hahn, four erroneous notions prevent the realisation of interbeing: self, person, living being and life span. Firstly, the notion of self is misleading because:

> What we call a self is made only of nonself elements. When we look at a flower, for example, we may think that it is different from “nonflower” things. But when we look more deeply, we see that everything in the cosmos is in that flower. Without all of the nonflower elements – sunshine, clouds, earth, minerals, heat,

\(^3\) *Idappaccayata* is more commonly known as *paticcasaumphada* (dependent origination, dependent co-arising), especially when used to explain *dukkha* (suffering).
rivers, and consciousness – a flower cannot be. That is why the Buddha teaches that the self does not exist. (Thich Nhat Hanh 2000b:87)

Secondly, the notion of person is mistaken because nonhuman elements make up a human and thus there can be no distinction between what is human and nonhuman. Thirdly, the notion of living being is flawed because what we refer to as inanimate objects are as alive as us; after all, their elements are part of us because, at the basic level, we are all made up of atoms and energy. Lastly, the notion of life span is dualistic because we cannot separate life and death. Rather, they are “two aspects of the same reality” (Thich Nhat Hanh 2000b:89); life enables death and vice-versa. If we learn to respect life and die gracefully, we allow others to live and flourish. Our misplaced engrossment with the notions of self, person, living being and life span has led to the present situation of environmental degradation. For example, when we exist only as small selves, the larger selves – the forest, the mountain, the river and the atmosphere - suffer. Only when we consciously embrace ‘universal ecology’ can we transform the situation. This embracement starts with cleaning the pollution within our mind, developing inner peace that reverberates, and taking mindful actions throughout each day of our lives.

Given this newfound scholarship on ecology in Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, it is not surprising that Buddhist environmental activism has been on the rise within the last few decades. Buddhists have been involved in protecting and replanting forest (Darlington 2000; 2003; Ekachai 2001; Isager & Ivarsson 2002; Kabilsingh 1990a; Taylor 1997; Udomittipong 2000), regenerating an ecologically significant lake (Henning 2002; Santikaro Bhikkhu 2000), resisting the construction of a major gas pipeline (Gmuzdek 2000), protesting the destruction of old-growth Californian redwoods (Volheim 2000) and assisting the development of the Earth Charter (Rockefeller 1997). They have grappled with issues such as nuclear waste (Kraft 1997; Macy 2000), population control (Gross 1997) and consumerism (Amidon 2000; Gross 1997; Sivaraks 2000). Vegetarianism is another prominent issue because it pertains to compassionate attitude to animals and is conducive to reduction of environmental damage (Galtung 1993; Glass 2000; Kapleau 1981).

On the spiritual front, new meditation practices based on traditional forms are emerging in an attempt to change the perception of ourselves and our relationship with the earth. Many of these are developed by Westerners and are often influenced by deep ecology. Some are concerned with reconnecting us with nature and place, and making us appreciative of our oneness and interdependence (Henning 2002; Johnson 2000; McMahon 2000; Minogue 2000; Seed 2000). Others involve mindfulness of our sensations, thoughts and emotions in times of crisis (Kaza 2000) or in our daily activities which impact nature (Amidon 2000; Glass 2000; Thich Nhat Hanh 2002). Joanna Macy’s Work that Reconnects (2006) based on her book Coming Back to Life (1998) is one example. It brings people together to
experience the world as alive and interconnected while unblocking painful emotions that prevent the betterment of the world (Figure 3.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of the Work that Reconnects</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• to provide people the opportunity to experience and share with others their innermost responses to the present condition of our world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to reframe their pain for the world as evidence of their interconnectedness in the web of life, and hence of their power to take part in its healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to provide people with concepts - from systems science, deep ecology, or spiritual traditions - which illumine this power, along with exercises which reveal its play in their own lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to provide methods by which people can experience their interdependence with, their responsibility to, and the inspiration they can draw from past and future generations, and other life-forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to enable people to embrace the Great Turning* as a challenge which they are fully capable of meeting in a variety of ways, and as a privilege in which they can take joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• to bring people into mutual support and collaboration in working for the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* refers to the shift from the industrial growth society to a life-sustaining civilization

Figure 3.2: Goals of Works that Reconnects (as stated in http://www.joannamacy.net/)

Both conservation and spiritual practices are brought together at a few meditation centres in North America such as Green Gulch Zen Center, Spirit Rock Meditation Center (Kaza 1997) and Zen Mountain Center (Yamauchi 1997). These show early potential for institutional development of a comprehensive ecological ethics based on Buddhist principles and practices.

3.2.2 The Social Outlook of Buddhism

Buddhism’s social outlook may hold great hope for a sustainable world. This outlook is based on its social ethics. Ethics involves a set of principles governing right conduct (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language 2000). In many religions, ethics is often associated with the laws or commandments of a god who sits in judgement over human subjects. Buddhism, on the other hand, is non-theistic and therefore views ethics differently. Buddhism regards ethics within the context of its cosmology and believes that an ethical action is one that is in line with the natural order of the universe (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1993; Phra Prayudh Payutto 1995).

There are two important points in Buddhist ethical theory. Firstly, it is closely associated with the concept of karma - that for every action there is an inescapable consequence (a positive action results in
a positive consequence and a negative action results in a negative consequence). Buddhism believes that karma is an important natural law of the universe. Hence, an ethical action must be an action that produces positive karma and the result is greater harmony in the universe. Secondly, Buddhist ethics provides a foundation for realising the ultimate goal of enlightenment (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1993; de Silva 2002; Mann & Youd 1998; Phra Medhidhammaporn 1994; Phra Prayudh Payutto 1995; Tachibana 1975). Thus, ethics is fundamental to liberation from suffering and rebirth.

At the heart of Buddhist ethics are the five lay precepts:

1. To abstain from killing any living being
2. To abstain from taking what is not given
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicants causing carelessness.

(Phra Medhidhammaporn 1994:28)

The precepts can be viewed as means to purify and ennoble the mind rather than commandments to adhere to. Equally important, they serve to promote stability and harmony in society because each precept also contains a positive aspect (Harvey 2000; Kornfield 1995; Kulananda 1997; Phra Medhidhammaporn 1994). These precepts are discussed briefly below.

1. The first precept

The first precept focuses on refraining from taking life, both humans and non-humans. In the social context, this prevents violence among individuals and among nations. Rectifying the present global situation of wars and ethnic conflicts requires resolutely upholding the first precept and cultivating the opposite of loving-kindness (metta). Loving-kindness is “the aspiration for the true happiness of any, and ultimately all, sentient beings” and is important because “all these are like oneself in liking happiness and disliking pain” (Harvey 2000:104). Loving-kindness is a key value found in all Buddhist traditions and it is emphasised by leading teachers such as the Dalai Lama (2003). It is used in conjunction with compassion (karuna) referring to empathy for and wish to relieve those in suffering.

2. The second precept

The second precept concerns abstaining from stealing and cheating. Breaking the second precept erodes trust and cooperation, key ingredients for building social capital (Putnam 1993; 2000). Buddhists view all types of stealing as motivated by greed and, hence, the challenge is to overcome it. Generosity (caga) is “the constant practice of giving and sharing” (Phra Medhidhammaporn 1994:101) and is a

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4 Mahayana traditions often expand on the five precepts by adding those associated with bodhisattva virtues where the emphasis is on saving other sentient beings.
powerful antidote to greed (lobha). There are different levels of generosity as Kulananda and Houlder (2002:128) explain:

… giving money and possessions is only a start…. At the very top of the list comes the gift of understanding reality. Next is the gift of merit: that encapsulates the idea that we can give away our own goodness, so that others will benefit from it. Then comes the gift of education and culture.

The challenge of today is to develop new ways of incorporating generosity in our daily social interactions (individual level) as well as to integrate it into national and international systems (structural level) where whole societies can benefit.

3. The third precept
The third precept centres on sexual misconduct. Adultery is viewed as an unethical act because it leads to suffering. Hence, as one would not want others to steal one’s spouse, one should refrain from committing the very act (Harvey 2000). To counter the powerful drive of sexual desire, Buddhism advocates fostering contentment in marriage and simplicity of living (Phra Medhidhammaporn 1994). In addition, sex should be put in the context of social and global well-being rather than commercialised as a tool for short-term gratification (Kulananda 1997).

4. The fourth Precept
The fourth precept concerns abstaining from lying. Lying applies to both individuals and institutions as both forms erode trust - they “undermine the very foundation of human interaction” (Kulananda 1997:101). To prevent lying, the Buddhist advice is simply to adhere zealously to the truth whatever the consequences. The fourth precept is also related to Right Speech\(^5\), a component of the Eightfold Path. Right Speech concerns refraining from saying anything that is harmful and, hence, the Buddha advocated abstention from 1) false speech, 2) libel/slander, 3) harsh speech and 4) vain talk/gossip (Phra Prayudh Payutto 1995). Only uttering that which contributes to peace among people and understanding of truth is encouraged.

5. The fifth Precept
The last precept concerns abstaining from alcohol or drugs. Buddhism views consumption and addiction of these substances as a threat to the well-being of both the individual and society. Consumption of alcohol is not viewed as detrimental in itself (although excessive consumption, of course, leads to health problems) but, rather, because insobriety creates the potential for breaking all the

\(^5\) While the phrase ‘Right Speech’ is used and has been retained since the time of the Buddha, it likely applies to all forms of communication.
other precepts (Harvey 2000). Mindfulness (sati) is promoted as an antidote to insobriety because it involves vigilance over activities to ensure that they are ethical:

... sati point[s] to the positive qualities of carefulness, circumspection, and clarity about one’s duties and the condition of being constantly prepared to deal with situations and respond appropriately. Especially when speaking of ethical conduct, the functioning of sati is often compared to that of a gatekeeper whose job is to keep his eyes on the people passing in and out, restricting entry and exit to only the proper people. (Phra Prayudh Payutto 1995:255)

Mindfulness is vital for personal and social well-being. In the first instance, mindfulness, trained through meditation, is a foundation for spiritual advancement and, hence, happiness and wisdom. With regards to society, a mindful individual radiates joy, does no harm to others and contributes to its integrity.

The five precepts are derived from the oldest Buddhist teachings and are ideals for behaviour in lay society. As such they have influenced the development of social norms in many Buddhist societies. The precepts espouse the notion of self-restraint rather than abstinence (Tachibana 1975). Self-restraint occurs when action is based not on immediate pleasant or unpleasant sensations but, rather, on whether it produces long-term mental development (Goldstein 2002). Self-restraint purifies the body and mind and produces benefits that accrue to both the individual and the society. To the individual, it results in a level of happiness derived from living an unblemished life without guilt and from living in harmony with nature and society. To society, it generates trust, strong relational bonds and peace feeding cyclically back to the individual to form the bedrock of a sustainable society.

In conclusion, Buddhism’s social outlook as embodied by the ethical precepts is applicable both at the individual level and the structural level, and offers a resolutely non-violent approach to social relations. Buddhist ecology provides a strong philosophical foundation of interdependence accompanied by ecological ethics based on frugality and respect. The combination of both can provide an ideal platform for the project of sustainability.

**3.3 Buddhist Theory of Economics**

This section examines the economic ideas of Buddhism. Many Buddhists strongly object to capitalism’s pervasive influence in the world as reflected in the words of Buddhadasa:

> We are experiencing the problem that these evil-minded capitalists are sucking the blood out of humanity to such an extent that the poor must rise up to fight and destroy their enemy, flooding the world with blood. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu in Jackson 2003:236)
Buddhadasa’s disdain for capitalism and his revolutionary calling to replace it with ‘Dhammic Socialism’ are legendary (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1993). However, Buddhadasa’s central rejection of conventional economic doctrines has found support among a broad group of Buddhist commentators (for example, Changkhwan yuen 2004; Kulananda 1997; Norberg-Hodge 1999; Onkom 2003; P.A. Payutto 1987; Phra Phaisan Visalo 1998; Santikaro Bhikkhu 1997; Simmer-Brown 2002; Sivaraksa 1999; Somboon 2002). As Payutto writes, economics has positioned itself deceptively as a ‘value-free’ social science:

> The economic process begins with want, continues with choice, and ends with satisfaction, all of which are functions of mind. Abstract values are thus the beginning, the middle and the end of economics, and so it is impossible for economics to be value-free. Yet as it stands, many economists avoid any consideration of values, ethics, or mental qualities, despite the fact that these will always have a bearing on economic concerns. (P.A. Payutto 1994a:27)

Simply put, Payutto argues that economics has positioned itself as ‘value-neutral’ to avoid the issue of ethics. Buddhism, on the other hand, contends that every action, whether considered scientific, religious or secular, entails an ethical dimension which must always be addressed. Not doing so entails a gross neglect of the inseparability of human existence with life and the universe.

One of the most conspicuous manifestations of economic development has been consumerism. Consumerism has been much maligned in the Buddhist community and is regarded as pernicious, leading Loy and Watts (1998) to call it the ‘religion of consumption’ and Sivaraksa (1999) to parody Descartes ‘I buy therefore I am’. These commentators assert that consumerism has not satisfied human well-being but, instead, produced wastefulness and addictions. As Kaza (1999:60) puts it, “shopping is a core activity in sustaining a culture of denial” and is a reflection of the ugly traits of humanity, namely, desire and greed. Consumerism reflects conventional economic thinking that encourages overconsumption to satisfy unlimited want. In response to the spread of consumerism and the underlying economic thinking, a new alternative approach known as ‘Buddhist economics’ has emerged over the last three decades.

### 3.3.1 Principles and Elements of Buddhist Economics

Although Buddhism has influenced the way of life for centuries (Alexandrin 1993; Daniels 1988; Ormatowski 1996), Buddhist economics as a concept first appeared in Small is Beautiful (Daniels 2002; Zadek 1997), the seminal work of E. F. Schumacher (1977). Buddhist economics was Schumacher’s attempt to find a more humanistic approach to development beyond the competitive nature of conventional economics. In his effort, Schumacher drew inspiration from the concept of Right Livelihood, an element in the Eightfold Path of Buddhism.
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Buddhist economics contains three related themes. Firstly, work is regarded as an opportunity for people to 1) engage in self-development, 2) overcome self-centredness through cooperation and socialisation, and 3) create needed goods and services for society. This is contrary to conventional economics where work is viewed as labour, a cost to be minimised. Secondly, the aim of Buddhist economics is “to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption” through simplicity, non-violence and self-sufficiency (Schumacher 1977:42). This contrasts with conventional economics where the aim is the unlimited growth of consumption to improve living standards. Thirdly, Buddhist economics involves long-term thinking and supports the prudent use of non-renewable resource. Again, this contrasts with conventional economics where inefficiency and inequity are the hallmarks.

However, Schumacher’s application of Buddhism to the economic realm is somewhat liberal; he was neither Buddhist - in fact, a Catholic - nor particularly well versed in the canons (Daniels 2002; Zadek 1997). Hence the Buddhist economics he offered can be considered a utopian vision symbolising a call for change (Zadek 1997). Nevertheless, his thinking has been influential in the emergence of sustainability and ecological economics (Daniels 2002).

3.3.2 Recent Interpretations

A number of authors have elaborated on the concept of Buddhist economics using different approaches. These include Pryor (1990; 1991), Ornatowski (1996), Daniels (2002; 2003) and Zadek (1993; 1997). However, perhaps the most influential work to date is Venerable Payutto’s Buddhist Economics (1994a).

Payutto terms Buddhist economics ‘Middle Way economics’ and states that it has two key characteristics: 1) realisation of well-being based on optimum consumption and 2) non-harming of oneself and others. Firstly, Buddhist economics is driven by chanda, desire guided by intelligent understanding of truth and wisdom, rather than tanha, unlimited desire for pleasure that results in excesses and selfishness. Chanda leads to the defining quality of mattanmutta, the understanding of moderation in consumption:

Knowing moderation means knowing the optimum amount, how much is “just right”. It is an awareness of that optimum point where the enhancement of true well-being coincides with the experience of satisfaction. This optimum point, or point of balance, is attained when we experience satisfaction at having answered

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6 This is virtually identical to the goal of sustainability according to Meadows (1999a) in her pyramidal framework as outlined in Chapter 2.

7 For example, in the case of food, chanda leads to eating simple, nutritious food with the goal of health, whereas tanha leads to overeating or eating health-destroying food based on taste and also to hoarding behaviour.
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the need for quality of life or wellbeing. Consumption, for example, which is attuned to the Middle Way, must be balanced to an amount appropriate to the attainment of well-being rather than the satisfaction of desires. Thus, in contrast to the classical economic equation of maximum consumption leading to maximum satisfaction, we have moderate, or wise consumption, leading to well-being. (P.A. Payutto 1994a:69)

Secondly, Buddhist economics opposes activities that harm others and promotes only activities that produce true well-being for all sentient beings including non-humans. Since the world is a set of interconnected spheres of individuals, society and nature, economic activities must be considered within the totality of their causal effects – good or bad. Buddhist economics, unlike conventional economics, cannot avoid these ethical considerations. The aim of Buddhist economics must be to create harmony between all spheres of life in order to allow people to achieve well-being, the ultimate form of which is enlightenment.

Following Payutto’s philosophical framework, two formal models of Buddhist economics have been developed, that of Piboolsravut (1998) and Puntasen (2001), although these are beyond the scope of this review because of their theoretical nature. However, they exhibit typical characteristics of Buddhist economics as outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Comparison of key features in Buddhist economics and neoclassical economics (adapted from Daniels 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Mainstream (neoclassical) economics</th>
<th>Buddhist economics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main actor &amp; action</td>
<td>Individual as a producer or consumer to satisfy endless material wants</td>
<td>Individual as seeker of spiritual fulfillment satisfying basic needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ultimate goal</td>
<td>Maximum profit or utility from consumption</td>
<td>Nirvana; liberation from cycle of birth, death and attachments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of achieving ideal outcome</td>
<td>Free market mechanism, competition</td>
<td>Awareness, wisdom; action guided by Dharma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View of nature; material reality</td>
<td>Cornucopian; natural capital fully substitutable and only for human use</td>
<td>Interrelated; transitive; dependent on karmic actions; reverence for all life. Minimum exploitation and intervention brings greater happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-space relations</td>
<td>Euclidean; equilibrium forces</td>
<td>Impermanence; cyclical and recursive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying ethical basis</td>
<td>None – claims value neutrality. In reality, maximum material accumulation = maximum happiness</td>
<td>Strong ethical basis permeating all activity; morality based on the wisdom of the Four Noble Truths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable individual virtues</td>
<td>Self-interest, hard work, entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Compassion, kindness, generosity, sharing, diligence, frugality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peace</th>
<th>Assumed unaffected by competitive interaction, loss and waste and conflict over scarce resources; Enhanced by resulting wealth</th>
<th>A major goal based on compassion, empathy, trust, self-sufficiency; reverence for life above individual material fulfillment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual-society relations</td>
<td>Liberalism, freedom, individual competition</td>
<td>Freedom for enlightenment; collective concern; harmony; peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic approach</td>
<td>Neoclassical economics</td>
<td>Humanistic; shared features with institutional, post-Keynesian, ecological economics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>A factor to be minimised in production regardless of social or environmental impacts. For workers, a necessary evil to enable leisure and consumption</td>
<td>Work as an end in itself; a cooperative, creative process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this summary, Buddhist economics is clearly centred on spiritual liberation, viewing right action and consumption as those that support the quest for purity and enlightenment. Nevertheless, Buddhist economics does not necessarily attempt to promote an austere society reminiscent of early Protestantism (Matsudo 2000). As several authors note, the original Pali text opposes all forms of poverty or extreme abstinence while acknowledging the role of wealth and acts of generosity (Batchelor 2002; Kulananda & Houlder 2002; P.A. Payutto 1994a; Prothero 2002).

In conclusion, Buddhist economics provides a challenge to conventional economics through rational critique. It is a significant theoretical contribution to sustainability because conventional economic theories lie at the heart of unsustainability. Buddhist economics proposes an alternative vision of society based on consumption as a mean to satisfy well-being, rather than as an end to itself. Therefore, it is similar to ecological economics and Donella Meadows’ systemic sustainability. However, unlike these secular counterparts, Buddhist economics is founded on a unique cosmology that gives prime importance to Buddhist views of ethics, consequence of action, the nature of the mind and spiritual goal in life.
3.4 Buddhist Development Paradigms

This section outlines two notable development paradigms that draw on Buddhist economics, namely, Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness (GNH) and Thailand’s Sufficiency Economy. Both of these development paradigms have many parallels with the concept of sustainability.

Although GNH may appear as somewhat of a nebulous concept, it is a unique non-Western development paradigm that is being put into practice (Priesner 1999; Thinley 1999). GNH was introduced by the King of Bhutan as an alternative to conventional development to embody Buddhist and Bhutanese values. As Thinley (1999:17) states:

Within Bhutanese culture, inner spiritual development is as prominent a focus as external material development. This follows from an original meaning of development in Bhutanese context in which development meant enlightenment of the individual. I hasten to add that enlightenment is not solely an object of religious activity. Enlightenment is blossoming of happiness. It is made more probable by consciously creating a harmonious psychological, social, and economic environment.

Thinley’s writing illustrates the recurring theme in Buddhist thinking that material progress should be subordinated to spiritual progress. Economic development, among other factors including cultural integrity, environmental health and good governance - termed the ‘Four Pillars’ (Faris 2004) - is only important in so far as it serves the attainment of happiness, with enlightenment being the ultimate form (Mancall 2004). Thus, GNH serves as a framework to emphasise the instrumentality of economics and to re-orient society towards achieving Buddhist goals in well-being. Though GNH faces many hurdles, Bhutan is actively pursuing theoretical development and on-the-ground initiatives (Hargens 2002) while attempting to garner support from worldwide audiences as seen in the global conferences on GNH.⁸

GNH’s counterpart in Thailand is the concept of Sufficiency Economy developed by the King. This concept is less overtly spiritual than GNH but also draws on concepts from Buddhism. Sufficiency Economy can be regarded as consisting of three interrelated components: moderation; reasonableness; and the need for self-immunity (UNDP 2007). Moderation conveys the idea of not having too much and not having too little and is closely linked to the Middle Way in Buddhism as described by Payutto (1994a). Reasonableness concerns making decisions based on sound understanding of long-term consequences using all knowledge, experience and wisdom available. Self-immunity promotes the idea of a resilient society, both locally and nationally, that can withstand the impact of globalisation.

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⁸ The most recent major conference was the Third International Conference on Gross National Happiness held in Bangkok in November 2007. See http://www.gnh-movement.org/.
Sufficiency Economy also emphasises ethics or moral integrity as being essential to development, a theme also found in the works of Schumacher (1977) and Payutto (1994a).

Sufficiency Economy has been influential in Thai government policies. Indeed, it is the thrust of Thailand’s 10th National Economic and Social Development Plan which commenced in 2007 (NESDB 2005). Sufficiency Economy is a Buddhist approach to development that combines pragmatism and avoidance of extremes, and focuses on sustainable livelihood to help people cope with increasing uncertainties (Bunuri 2007). Although the commitment of successive Thai governments to its implementation may be doubted given the stranglehold of conventional economics, Sufficiency Economy has stimulated much debate on whether Buddhist ideals can be applied in a modernising country.

Both GNH and Sufficiency Economy represent Buddhist attempts to free their respective society from the Western development model and the excesses of transnational market capitalism. Despite many obstacles, both show potential that they can be applied given the will: GNH is more appropriate at policy level, as a “unifying goal” (Thinley 2007:3) while Sufficiency Economy is more applicable at the local level as a mean to foster self-reliance and resilience (Senanarong 2004). Thus, GNH and Sufficiency Economy represent steps towards a model of development that places people first, building their capacity to engage in a more sustainable way of life.

3.5 Buddhist Community Initiatives

This section describes the ideas and concepts for community living based on Buddhism. Several communities around the world have attempted to use Buddhist ecological, social and economic thinking to live sustainably. Probably the most well-known of these is Sarvodaya, the largest non-governmental organisation in Sri Lanka.

Sarvodaya began in 1958 and implements Buddhist development programs in around 11,300 villages out of 25,000 nationwide (Ariyaratne 1999). Sustainable development is given an overtly spiritual definition by Sarvodaya’s founder, Dr. Ariyaratne (1999:17):

Sustainable development is the capacity of a community to maintain the conditions under which such an awakening is possible not only for the present generation but of the future generations as well. It is a sustained effort to awaken in all aspects, spiritual and ethical as well as social and economic, the individual, the family, the community, rural as well as urban groups, nations and the world community.
Thus, Sarvodaya’s concept of sustainability concerns achieving total human fulfillment, especially at the basic level, and is a far cry from conventional economic thinking. It is in line with Buddhist and systemic thinking on sustainability. Sarvodaya’s emphasis on ‘awakening’ is also very similar to that of GNH which uses the term ‘enlightenment’.

To achieve awakening, Sarvodaya uses an innovative application of the Four Noble Truths (Figure 3.3). The First Noble Truth (there is suffering) is translated as “there is decadent village” (Macy 1994:153) and is used to raise awareness of issues confronting the village such as poverty and health. This is a highly participatory process and is conceptually similar to conscientization (Fals-Borda & Rahman 1991; Freire 1970). The Second Noble Truth (the cause of suffering) blames greed, selfishness, competitiveness and lack of cohesion as the cause of decadence. These negative desires have been exacerbated by Western influences since colonial times. The Third Noble Truth (the cessation of suffering) provides hope that all can be awaken; through action and will, fortunes can change in

Figure 3.3: Path to village re-awakening (adapted from Ariyaratne 1999)
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accordance with the principle of karma that states that good deed can result in prosperity. The message is that villagers can make a difference by taking responsibility over action. Lastly, the Eightfold Path which constitutes the Fourth Noble Truth is used as a guide for social action: Right Understanding and Right Intention is interpreted as the understanding of communal interdependence; Right Speech concerns honesty, truth and compassion; Right Action, Right Livelihood and Right Effort become ideals for cooperation in the diverse activities of improvement; Right Mindfulness is about anticipating and observing the needs of the village and its people; and, Right Concentration incorporates meditation in many facets of daily life (Macy 1994).

Similar initiatives exist in Thailand albeit on a limited scale. In several communities, Buddhist monks are spearheading alternative development schemes to counteract poverty, environmental degradation and moral decline (see for example, Ekachai 2001). In doing so, they are renewing Buddhism historical involvement in social as well as spiritual affairs (Ariyaratne 1980). Again, as in Buddhist ecology, the works of Buddhadasa have been influential. These so-called ‘development monks’ have sought to use the principles of dhamma to create enterprises that alleviate the suffering of rural people caused by economic modernisation (Nozaki 2003). They have created water buffalo banks, rice banks, saving unions and cooperative stores as means to foster self-reliance and community resilience. The efforts of Santi Asoke are also noteworthy as a community constructed on Buddhist principles and Buddhist economics that keeps its distance from the globalised economy (Sangsehanat 2004).

Sustainable living according to Buddhist principles can also be seen in some Western countries. Windhorse Trading, a Right Livelihood enterprise run by UK-based Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), imports handicrafts and gift items to sell in Europe. It is committed to fair trade, communal living and efficient resource usage. However, its most notable features are its philosophy and purpose which are radically different from conventional businesses. As its website colloquially proclaims:

… we're a bunch of Buddhists and Buddhist ethics come from the belief that all things are interconnected … [This] means that we try to live and work in a kind and aware way, doing as little harm as possible. All 80 of us who work here want to work with other Buddhists and want to help make money to give away. Our profits support Buddhist activities all over the world. We all earn roughly the same and are committed to living a simple and sustainable lifestyle.9

One of the aims of Windhorse Trading is to demonstrate that it is possible to operate outside the ‘system of money-slavery’ where more and more people fall into the trap of working in soul-destroying jobs to earn income to feed overconsumption without finding happiness. Kulananda (1997) suggests

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9 This passage was taken from the website http://www.windhorsetrading.co.uk on 15 January 2004. However, it is no longer available.
that one solution is choosing to be poor, or what he calls living in ‘designer poverty’. He reasons that after meeting basic material necessities, the most important things in life, such as friendship, art, culture, nature and spirituality, are free. If we choose to live simply, we create fewer burdens for ourselves and the world. The duty of Buddhists is to set an example and demonstrate the transformative power of Buddhism:

We live in a society, most of whose members enjoy wealth, power and luxury beyond the dreams of medieval princes … whilst being simultaneously oppressed by a constant sense of present scarcity: one can never get enough. In all of this, perhaps the most effective means of social engagement that Western Buddhists can undertake is to get out into society and make the Buddha’s teachings available – open-handedly offering others the means to achieve a saner way of life: for the sake of themselves, for the sake of all. (Kulananda 1997:207)

Thus, the philosophy and aims of Windhorse Trading are similar to other Buddhist initiatives in other countries, such as Sarvodaya. It seeks to change the world by doing things differently and living life more sustainably based on the ecological, social and economic principles found in Buddhism.

In conclusion, Buddhist communities have proven that they can live sustainably (to the extent possible in a globalised world). Despite little or no support from governments, they have sought the guidance of the dharma, innovatively applying age-old principles. This is happening throughout the world as Buddhists are organising themselves to confront the ills of economism and ethical decline in their country. The contribution of these communities to the idea of sustainability is significant because these communities set examples of what can be done when people come together and cooperate on the basis on kindness, charity and a dedication to the spirituality of Buddhism. They show us the way to a different notion of community and whole-hearted living.

3.6 Individual Transformation and Sustainable Living

This section explores the literature on the impact of Buddhist practice on personal transformation and sustainability. While Buddhist writers and practitioners are providing new interpretations to address issues in sustainability and have shown that these can be applied at the philosophical, structural and community level, Buddhism’s potential for instigating change at the individual level has been less well documented. However, Buddhism’s traditional strength has always been individual transformation and leading Buddhist thinkers have advocated individual transformation as the key to sustainability. For example, Phra Dhammapitaka (1995) has enunciated that the key ingredient of the path to a sustainable world is human development and that ‘developed humans’ can then be used to change the system through a process of creating harmony between humans, society, nature and technology. Thus, at the core of his thesis is human ‘evolvability’ - the idea that humans should evolve resulting in more
appropriate economic behaviour based on wisdom and the desire to satisfy true well-being (Phra Dhammapitaka 1995). In the same vein, Buddhadasa has proposed the conservation of ‘inner ecology’ as the solution to our problems:

Please understand that if we protect the inner nature, the outer nature will be taken care of by itself. If there is mental and spiritual correctness, physical things will naturally be correct by themselves. (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1990b:n.p.)

For Buddhadasa, it is the mental pollution – selfishness and craving – in humans that has to be cleaned.

While the need for structural change is not neglected, the Buddhist argument prioritises individual mental development. Thus, for Sivaraksa (2005), a staunch structural reformer, Buddhism necessarily provides the tools “to reinvent our thought processes and transform greed, hatred, and delusion into generosity, compassion and wisdom the root causes of evil” (p.10). Echoing this sentiment, Loy (2003:35) writes:

For those who see the necessity of radical change, the first implication of Buddhist social praxis is the obvious need to work on ourselves as well as the social system. If we have not begun to transform our own greed, ill will, and delusion, our efforts to address their institutionalized forms are likely to be useless, or worse.

In other words, one must change oneself first before changing the world.

Unfortunately, the research on changing oneself, or, more precisely, the effectiveness of Buddhism in creating personal change towards sustainability, is sparse. As already reviewed, the literature has focused on national development paradigms and community initiatives. This is consistent with Tisdell’s (2002:66) contention that “there is a general lack of research-based literature about spiritual development in general”.

The existing literature on personal change concentrates on the practice of insight meditation (vipassana). Studies have attempted to gauge the effect of insight meditation retreats on: general behaviour and outlook (Somjit 1996); awareness of dharma principles (Pragaesuntisuk 1998); psychological health of the elderly (Pongpieng 1999); and managerial ethical development (Priyanon 2003). These studies confirm the positive benefits of insight meditation retreats on mental health, attitudes, ethical behaviour, physical health and the understanding of dharma. Much of this is consistent with numerous studies conducted in the West on the effect of meditation on stress and other health-related disorders (Kabat-Zinn 2000; Stein 2003).

However, in relation to sustainability, a more relevant piece of research is Healy’s phenomenological study of insight meditation (vipassana) as transformational learning (Healy 2001). Healy defines
transformational learning as “emancipatory learning, a process of freeing oneself from constraints on how to view and understand the world” (p.1). Healy studied the lives and spiritual practice of nine experienced meditators. He concludes that insight meditation “is a transformational learning process” (p.96 – stress in original). This process consists of five elements:

- Readiness
- Withdrawal
- Formal sitting practice
- Working out insights
- Expanded awareness of self

While the process is iterative, the last element of expanded awareness of self can be considered the outcome of the first four elements and demonstrates the potential of insight meditation to create change in individuals. Healy describes expanded awareness of self as “a holistic way of knowing or making sense of lived experience” (p.186) that involves both rational and non-rational ways of knowing. He provides many examples of how expanded awareness of self helped individuals alter behaviour in social situations because it allowed them to be less reactive to emotions, less controlled by habits and past conditionings or less “caught up” in difficult circumstances. This allowed them to be more patient, be more empathetic of others, be open to a wider range of solutions and act more thoughtfully. Thus, Healy believes that the development of an expanded awareness of self has improved the quality of relationship between insight meditation practitioners and other people, for example, family members, co-workers and students. Expanded awareness of self also provides other benefits such as the enhanced ability to cope with pain, the ability to gain intuitive “wisdom” and a sense of connectedness to something larger than the individual self.

Healy’s study is important because, it demonstrates the power of Buddhism, at least, in one strand of practice, to create individual change, a change that may be the platform for the ‘consciousness revolution’ and ‘new orientation to the universe’ that Grof et al. (1999) and Berry (2007) respectively regard as essential to the sustainability transition. Buddhism has the potential to radically change people’s heart and minds and enable them to live more sustainably.

Another issue related to personal transformation and Buddhist practice is ‘personal sustainability’. Personal sustainability is a concept I developed during the literature review. It is influenced by a paper of Bastick (1997). In his paper, Bastick borrows the phrase ‘The Sustainable Self’ from Crawford (1993) who uses it to convey the idea of an ecologically benign way of being that goes beyond Western renderings including that of deep ecology. Bastick uses it in a much simpler way drawing on his
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Buddhist perspective. For Bastick (1997), a sustainable self concerns a self that has the potential for transcendence, the ultimate form of which is enlightenment. He states:

Before this stage of self-transcendence [enlightenment] is reached, however, the practise of ethics and meditation aims at building a sustainable self. Contrary … to popular belief rather than being in the business of destroying the self, Buddhism considers it very important to build a strong, emotionally positive and integrated sense of self. (Bastick 1997:48)

In other words, a person with a sustainable self is someone with a secured psychological foundation that allows the sustaining of spiritual development. In elaboration, he writes:

Frustration, unhappiness, confusion are not conducive to sustaining a healthy, happy life. Rather than growing and developing, such a self is in danger of collapsing if it loses its props. (Bastick 1997:48)

The implication is that the conditions of frustration, unhappiness and confusion must be overcome first, at least to a certain degree as not to allow them to dominate life or hinder mental development. Hence, in this respect, Bastick believes that Buddhism has much in common with Western growth psychology. 10 This is in agreement with Aung Myint (2007) who provides a case for integrating Buddhist and Western approaches in psychotherapy:

While the Western approach diagnoses the problem as having “no self-esteem”, the Buddhist approach identifies the goal as having “no-self esteem”…. A common link between the two is the ecological “feeling self” that enhances the balance between self, other and environment, and thus enhances self-esteem in Western therapy, while the feeling self improves the empathic virtues of the individual to become a selfless person who liberates himself from suffering in the Buddhist approach. (p.279)

Ironically, realising the non-self, which is another conceptualisation of enlightenment, requires a positive sense of self. Along a similar line, Welwood (2000:150) argues:

Spiritual practice involves freeing consciousness from its entanglement in form, matter, emotions, personality, and social conditioning. In a society like ours, where the whole earthly foundation is weak to begin with, it is tempting to use spirituality as a way of trying to rise above this shaky ground. However, when people use spiritual practice to compensate for low self-esteem, social alienation, or emotional immaturity, they wind up with neither a healthy spirituality nor a healthy psychology.

For Welwood, spiritual practices cannot mask the inner lack felt among many people in our distraught society. Thus, Welwood (2000) uses the term ‘spirituality bypassing’ to describe this “tendency to use spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep personal, emotional ‘unfinished business’, to shore up a shaky sense of self, or to belittle basic needs, feelings, and developmental tasks in the name of enlightenment” (p.150).

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10 Growth psychology refers to humanistic psychology which focuses on the person as a whole.
From the experience of this researcher, there are many dedicated practitioners who struggle with deeper spiritual practices of Buddhism while simultaneously have difficulties in doing many ordinary things in life with some sense of ‘normality’. The contention here is that a person needs to be in a ‘real world’ with a ‘real’ sense of self in order to transcend self and world. An integrated sense of self is thus important, perhaps even critical, for the spiritual path, the very essence of which leads to ecological sustainability. This view is also supported by Western psychotherapy and its focus on underlying subtexts, often the result of childhood conditioning and deeply embedded in the psyche, that can play powerful roles in driving human behaviour (Kristeller 2003; Roemer & Orsillo 2003). These subtexts are major causes of frustration, unhappiness and confusion that Bastick discussed and, hence, help prevent a sustainable self from emerging.

The phrase ‘the sustainable self’ (Crawford 1993), however, is deeply embedded in metaphysics, something beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore the concept of ‘personal sustainability’ is used instead. Personal sustainability can be considered the ability of a person to achieve psychological well-being. It can be regarded as the psychological equivalence of the United Nations’ concept of ‘human security’ (Commission on Human Security 2003). It resides at the top of Meadows’ pyramid where states such fulfillment, self-actualization, transcendence and enlightenment inhabit. Thus, it is the capacity to realise such states. Personal sustainability can also be viewed as a stable platform to undertake the realisation of higher levels of well-being. It can be regarded as a state of mind that provides enough security and ‘integratedness’ to allow progress towards higher planes of well-being. The concept of personal sustainability in this thesis is less ambitious than the sustainable self; it merely seeks to initiate the empirical exploration of the link between psychological integrity and sustainability, and the influence of Buddhism on these. If Buddhism is really an “analytic inquiry into the nature of self” (Epstein 1995:5) with the ability to identify conditioning, particularly operant conditioning (Kristeller 2003), then this exploration should shed light on issues that society must confront in order to proceed in the quest for sustainability.

3.7 Research Aim

In Chapter 2, the history and characteristics of sustainability were reviewed. That chapter ended with a description of Meadows’ pathway to sustainability which consists of a pyramidal framework and a scheme of leverage points. This chapter highlighted Buddhism’s involvement in sustainability, both

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11 Human security tries to ensure the most basic level of rights, freedom and opportunities in the absence of violent conflict.

12 The opposite of personal sustainability is personal unsustainability. Personal unsustainability is an unstable psychological state that leads to a general incapacity to participate in the world, the extreme forms of which are drug abuse, alcohol addiction and suicide.
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Theoretically and practically, but finished with a somewhat surprising situation: that there is little empirical evidence to explain whether and how Buddhism is changing the hearts and minds of people towards more sustainable ways of thinking, living and being. Thus, the aim of this study is:

... to explore the ways in which the beliefs, practices and transformational tools within Buddhism can contribute to living sustainably.

Four research questions were formulated to help achieve this aim. These were guided by concepts in the literature. All four research questions are closely related and their separation is necessary only to aid analysis and writing.

**Research Question 1**

*How have the beliefs and practices of Buddhism helped people address the problems of personal (un)sustainability in their lives?*

This question explores the concept of personal sustainability. It attempts to gauge the impact of Buddhism on the psychological well-being of individuals. It seeks to understand aspects of Buddhism that can help people overcome deep personal issues, traumas and conditionings which prevent the attainment of happiness and self-fulfillment. Personal sustainability is important because it is regarded as the foundation of fully functioning individuals who can productively engage in the world in order to change themselves and the world towards sustainability.

**Research Question 2**

*To what extent, and in what ways, does seeking to live through following Buddhist beliefs and practices lead to a process of paradigmatic transformation in people's lives?*

In contrast to research question 1, this question draws directly from Donella Meadows’ writing. In particular, Meadows contends that the most powerful leverage points in a system, hence the most powerful ways to produce transformation leading to systemic sustainability, lie at the paradigm level. The two leverage points at this level are: shifting paradigms and transcending paradigms. Research question 2 refers directly to these leverage points. It seeks to answer whether Buddhism can induce a paradigm shift among individuals and, if so, what are the characteristics of the new paradigm. It also seeks to investigate what Buddhism can reveal about paradigm transcendance. Investigating this research question begins the debate on how to achieve paradigmatic transformation. This is important to
the psychological transition to sustainability and how this transition is linked to behavioural changes with regards to specific aspects of sustainability.

**Research Question 3**

*To what extent, and in what ways, does the process of transformation contribute to a change in purpose and goals of life and notion of happiness?*

This research question addresses Meadows’ leverage point of system goals. Societal goals are merely derived from an institutionalised consensus of individual goals. Modern society’s dominant goal of infinite material growth reflects the desire of the majority of the world’s population, or at least those with choice, to accumulate material goods equating such accumulation to happiness. The institutionalisation of this goal through neo-liberal economics has made this pursuit of material goods very efficient for the rich but at the expense of social equity and planetary health. Therefore, this question seeks to understand the potential contribution of Buddhism to goals and purpose in life, and the meaning of happiness. It seeks to provide alternative descriptions of goals, purpose and happiness – something nobler that humanity can aspire to – in order to bring about a sustainable world.

**Research Question 4**

*What are the implications of Buddhism for sustainability thinking and practice?*

This question attempts to highlight the theoretical and practical implications of Buddhist practices and worldviews on sustainability. It does so by placing the findings from Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 within Meadows’ pathway towards systemic sustainability. This pathway is the fusion of Meadows’ pyramidal framework and her scheme of leverage points. Research Question 4 seeks to forward a Buddhist perspective on realigning human thought and behaviour in a order to create a new kind of society.
CHAPTER 4:  
THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design of the study. As such it outlines the methodology, method and techniques used in the study. Van Manen (1990) describes methodology as “the philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective” (p.27) that guide research. As such, it includes “the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge, and the sense of what it means to be human” (p.27). Van Manen defines research method as the way in which a research study is carried out while he refers the specific tool or procedure for data gathering and analysis as the research techniques.¹

Clarifying these aspects of the research design helps to establish the trustworthiness of the study. This is especially important in a study such as this one which is values-based, with the data collection, analysis and interpretation guided by a commitment to Buddhist principles. This acknowledgement reflects Lather’s argument that research is not neutral as it is “a value-constituted and value-constituting enterprise, no more outside the power/knowledge nexus than any other human creation” (Lather 1991:27). Carew and Lightfoot (1979) argue similarly that researchers are “not merely the lens of a camera” but “selective interpreters” of what they observe. They continue:

No matter how quantitative and objective the research strategy appears, there is a point when researchers offer their interpretations, use their intuitions, and apply their values. Research, therefore, is a selective process that combines empirical data, rational thinking, judgment, and intuition. Each of these modes of understanding and analysing phenomena are valid and valuable and can be made conscious parts of the research process. (p. 23)

Hesse (1980:247) summarises this position by arguing that “[t]he attempt to produce value-neutral social science is increasingly being abandoned … and is being replaced by social sciences based upon explicit ideologies”. In basing this study upon such a values-based approach to social science research, it is important that the values which guided the research design are clearly articulated. As Lather (1986) notes, researchers need to be explicit about the interests that guide them. The interests that guided this study are outlined in Section 4.2 which locates the research methodology within the traditions of mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro 1998).

¹ This differs from other authors who categorise data gathering tools as method – see, for example, Blaikie (1993), Crotty (1996) and Travers (2001).
This chapter consists of six substantive sections. Section 4.2 explores the methodology of mindful inquiry and explains its adoption as the metaperspective for this study. Section 4.3 outlines the research method of basic interpretive qualitative study that combines elements from ethnography, case study, phenomenological study and critical research. Section 4.4 documents the research techniques used in this study giving particular emphasis to in-depth interviews. Section 4.5 reviews issues of trustworthiness and argues that the non-positivist criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are appropriate in a study of this kind. Section 4.6 discusses ethical concerns and how these were addressed. Finally, Section 4.7 outlines the actual events that took place during the study and divides these into four stages beginning with conceptualising the research and ending with the portrayal of the participants’ stories and paradigmatic transformation.

4.2 The Methodology of Mindful Inquiry

This section outlines the methodology of mindful inquiry adopted in this study that was developed by Bentz and Shapiro (1998). Mindful inquiry is a “philosophy of research” which synthesises the four intellectual traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical social science and Buddhism (Bentz and Shapiro 1998:6). As such, it is a methodological union of East and West and is used in this study because it is consistent with Buddhist ontology and epistemology.

A key aspect of mindful inquiry is an emphasis on the role of the researcher as a person at the centre of research. This stands in contrast with approaches that seek to depersonalise research. As Bentz and Shapiro (1998:5) state:

… your research is - or should be – intimately linked with your awareness of yourself and your world. We strongly believe that your awareness and reflection that are woven into your research affect – or should affect – one another. Good research should contribute to your development as a mindful person, and your development as an aware and reflective individual should be embodied in your research.

Thus, mindful inquiry regards research as an integral part of life, incorporating the person’s identity, purposes, values and lifeworlds. Research is part of living, not an isolated or institutionalised act.

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2 Ontology is defined as “the study of being. It is concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality as such” (Crotty 1998). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), it refers to “what is there that can be known? ... Ontology is the branch of philosophy (specifically, of metaphysics) that is concerned with issues of existence of being as such. Another way to phrase it is this: ‘What is the nature of reality?’”

3 Epistemology, on the other hand, pertains to the nature of knowledge, the relationship between the knower (inquirer) and the known (object of inquiry) (Lincoln & Guba 1985), and is important in research because it “is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (Crotty 1998). To put it another way, it is about “different philosophical views on how or whether … it is possible to obtain certain or objective knowledge about the world” (Travers 2001).
In life, a person must take responsibility for his/her own action. This also applies in research: the person must take responsibility for the choice of approach taken and the consequences of the research within the wider community. In this light, the researcher is seen as much a philosopher as a scientist:

No matter how technical and mechanical research may be, at least at some points in the process, it always is also a form of philosophical inquiry. That is, it always involves philosophical assumptions about the nature of knowledge and of the world and about what the point of knowledge and research are in the first place. (Bentz & Shapiro 1998:31)

Bentz and Shapiro emphasise that philosophical interrogation combined with mindfulness and critical reflexivity are powerful tools for personal transformation, and transformation is regarded as a key aim of research. They propose thirteen ideas as forming the core philosophy of mindful inquiry:

1. Awareness of self and reality and their interaction is a positive value in itself and should be present in research processes.
2. Tolerating and integrating multiples perspectives is valuable.
3. It is important to bracket our assumptions and look at the often unaware, deep layers of consciousness and unconsciousness that underlie them.
4. Human existence, as well as research, is an ongoing process of interpreting both one’s self and others, including other cultures and subcultures.
5. All research involves both accepting bias – the bias of one’s own situation and context – and trying to transcend it.
6. We are always immersed in and shaped by historical, social, economic, political, and cultural structures and constraints, and those structures and constraints usually have domination and oppression, and therefore suffering, built into them.
7. Knowing involves caring for the world and the human life that one studies.
8. The elimination or diminution of suffering is an important goal of or value accompanying inquiry and often involves critical judgement about how much suffering is required by existing arrangements.
9. Inquiry often involves the critique of existing values, social and personal illusions, and harmful practices and institutions.
10. Inquiry should contribute to the development of awareness and self-reflection in the inquirer and may contribute to the development of spirituality.
11. Inquiry usually requires giving up ego and transcending self, even though it is grounded in self and requires intensified self-awareness.
12. Inquiry may contribute to social action and be part of social action
13. The development of awareness is not a purely intellectual or cognitive process but part of a person’s total way of living her life. (Bentz & Shapiro 1998:6)

Reflecting the open, inclusive nature of mindful inquiry, these ideas represent a synthesis of principles from critical theory, phenomenology, hermeneutics and Buddhism. Thus, Bentz and Shapiro (1998) describe mindful inquiry as “critical hermeneutic Buddhist phenomenology” or “phenomenological hermeneutic Buddhist critical social science” (p.43) and regard it as a “metaperspective” (p.37), which is equivalent in meaning to Van Manen’s concept of methodology. The components in mindful inquiry and its spiral process, as applied to this research, are now described.4

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4 Buddhism is left out because it has been examined in the previous chapter.
Critical theory asserts that “reason is the highest potentiality of human beings and that, through its use, it is possible to criticise and challenge the nature of existing societies” (Blaikie 1993:52). While its complex meanings and origins stemming from the Frankfurt School (Agger 1998) need not be discussed, contemporary critical theory is based upon several key principles. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) list these as:

1. **Critical enlightenment and emancipation** seeks to understand the dynamics of relationships among social groups, privileged and otherwise, in order to halt domination and control through emancipation.

2. **Rejection of economic determinism** provides equal standing to multiple forms of power (economic, race, gender, etc.) although accepts that economics can never be completely divorced from these.

3. **Critique of instrumental or technical rationality** eschews modern emphasis on procedure, method and technique at the expense of humanistic purpose and values.

4. **Impact of desire** recognises the importance of human psyche in power and domination, and hence of the role of psychoanalysis as a tool for change.

5. **Hegemony** involves the issue of oppressive power and its use through social psychological conditioning as well as a nuanced understanding of ideology to maintain oppressive power structure.

6. **Linguistic/discursive power** asserts that language serves the forces of domination.

7. **Cultural domination and pedagogy** recognises the domination of Western culture through commercialism, corporatism and their pedagogic agents and is concerned with counteracting this by exposing the nature of these processes. (p.281)

Critical theory is a vital component of mindful inquiry and its spirit pervades the hermeneutics and phenomenology of this approach. In Buddhism, the critical element also runs strong. Firstly, the Buddha is often viewed as a social reformer⁵ (Brazier 2001; Loy 2003; Sivaraksa 1997; Smith & Novak 2003): he directly challenged the prevalent Hindu philosophy of his time offering “a great revolutionary thought, a penetrative insight into things as they really are” (Inada 1988:263) which provided a new way of conceiving self and personal transformation. Secondly, his teaching had profound implications for the social stratum of the time: it challenged the caste system and the use of Brahmic rituals such as animal sacrifices (Hayes 1998). Thirdly, the emphasis in Buddhism on the removal of ignorance and the potential for human freedom parallels Freire’s (1970) concept of ‘conscientization’ and the development of critical consciousness (Fay 1987). Lastly, the monastic order within Buddhism provides an example of a life based on communalism, egalitarianism and spiritual dedication (Kulananda 1997; Sponsel & Natadecha-Sponsel 1997). In addition, Mahayana Buddhism’s emphasis on universal freeing of living beings has resulted in extraordinary acts of service to alleviate suffering (see, for example, Dass & Bush 1992; Khong 1993). Leading Theravada thinkers, Payutto and Buddhadasa, added to the cause by propounding the need for critical insight based on natural truth for social engagement (King 2002). Indeed, the latter has gone in so far as calling for dhammic revolution to overthrow unjust social

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⁵ Not all authors agree with this view. For example, Lancaster (1997) warns against this oversimplification and Westernisation citing early Buddhism’s cordial relationship with and reliance on wealthy merchants for its spread.
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systems founded on human defilements, such as capitalism which is founded on self-interest and greed (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu 1993). In sum, the links between Buddhism and critical theory are strong in both philosophy and action, and are thus integral aspects of mindful inquiry.

Hermeneutics is “the art or science of interpretation” (Macey 2000:179) and is a key to understanding ‘text’ in its various forms such as conversation, writing, artwork, and action (Neuman 2003). Mindful inquiry draws much from the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer as Bentz and Shapiro (1998:40) state:

It [hermeneutics] involves our understanding of all human culture and history and our own situation in culture and history. For everything human, including both our own and other selves and cultures, is expressed in language and symbols that must be interpreted to be understood. Therefore, we are beings whose knowledge – even our own self-knowledge – is always bound to processes of understanding and interpretation. Our ability to do this is formed and limited by the systems of culture, meaning, language, symbols, and interpretations that we inhabit and that form our context. Even our own self is something that we continually construct through our own interpretation and reinterpretation of our self, the languages and symbols in which our consciousness expresses itself, and the culture and world around us.

To talk of interpretation as part of being is to draw from Heidegger’s idea of Dasein in which our pre-understanding (the understanding embedded in our language, culture, social relations and history) cannot be separated from notions of the self (Crotty 1996). To express this in another way, “understanding is a mode of being rather than a mode of knowledge” (Blaikie 1993:34).

There are significant similarities and consistency between hermeneutics and Buddhism. Buddhism argues that reality is a social construction and, hence, the general notion that our existence is dependent on historical and social understanding is well within this scope. Hermeneutics also contains a critical aspect in common with Buddhism and critical theory in that, through understanding the limiting, all-pervasive influence of culture, it is possible to transcend it (Crotty 1998). As Kögler (1996:251) argues, “critical hermeneutics undertakes to lay out a concept of reflexivity-in-interpretation that allows the individual to distance herself from the taken-for-granted background of symbolic assumptions and social practices”.

Phenomenology focuses on “lived experience” and is “the study of the lifeworld – the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (Van Manen 1990:9). It is the study of what presents itself to our consciousness in aspects of everyday life. As Husserl’s famous notion of “going back to the things themselves” (Moran 2000:108) suggests, phenomenology concerns examining the experiential reality for what it is without resorting to philosophies or theories (Crotty 1996). The task of phenomenology is to describe the essence – the very
nature of something that makes it what it is – and to do so necessarily involves grasping its full meaning as construed in our normal existence of everyday life (Van Manen 1990). Through disengagement, known as bracketing, phenomenology sees itself as coming closer to objectivity in description of experiences and meanings. In summary, phenomenology is a systematic attempt to “reframe our knowledge of the world by focusing on the complex and elaborate structures through which this world and our knowledge of it are constructed in our consciousness” (Bentz & Shapiro 1998:41).

Phenomenology and Buddhism share some commonalities. Firstly, a key characteristic of phenomenology is thoughtfulness (Van Manen 1990). This is similar to the notion of mindfulness in Buddhism and which is a cornerstone of mindful inquiry. Both thoughtfulness and mindfulness involve appreciating mundane experiences deeply and in the full richness of details. Secondly, phenomenology and Buddhism are both empirical and experiential. This has led Waldron (2002:4) and Rubin (2003:34) to describe Buddhism as a “phenomenology of consciousness” and as “a highly sophisticated phenomenology of mind”, respectively. This is illustrated by Payutto (1993:n.p.) who states:

[A] method for finding knowledge used in Buddhism is that of verification through personal experience. One of the important principles of Buddhism is that the truth can be known and verified through direct experience.

For Buddhism, meditation serves a phenomenological purpose: the ‘slowing down’ involved in meditation provides for the “closer examination of the day-to-day mind” (Epstein 1995:3). Lastly, phenomenology shares the critical aspect with all the other elements of mindful inquiry. When nothing is taken for granted, when the most mundane assumptions of reality in life are investigated, and when cultural imposition on meanings are excluded, then phenomenology becomes a form of radical criticism:

… the science having the unique function of effecting the criticism of all others and, at the same time, of itself is none other then phenomenology. (Husserl 1970 in Crotty 1998:82)

Hence, phenomenology provides a perspective that is close to Buddhism in both philosophy and method of investigation, and this is recognised in mindful inquiry.

The Spiral of Mindful Inquiry

Bentz and Shapiro (1998) portray mindful inquiry as a spiral consisting of the aforementioned four philosophical components (Figure 4.1). The research problem is situated within the inquirer’s lifeworld and the inquiry moves from one turn to the next (it can be compared to the hermeneutic circle of Gadamer as a back and forth movement between the text and the whole (Mantzavinos 2005)). The spiral form is used “to emphasize the sense of expansion and forward motion that comes from circling
in time and touching various points, each time from a new point in time and in one’s own self-development” (Bentz & Shapiro 1998:42). Critical theory situates the research in the structure of power of existing social context with a view of liberation. Hermeneutics brings attention to interpretation as an interaction between inquirer and text. Phenomenology focuses on consciousness and the human experience and provides a host of tools for enhancing mindfulness, objectivity and criticism. Buddhism reinforces many of the characteristics of the others but its primary purpose is to emphasise mindfulness as an ‘existential choice’ and a way of living. Mindful inquiry is, thus, a metaperspective arising in the age of ‘paradigmatic confluence’, to use the words of Lincoln and Guba (2000). In this regard, Backhaus (2001:252) believes that the melding of constructivism, hermeneutics, phenomenology and critical theory interjected with a strong dose of mindfulness is “groundbreaking” and marks “a new form for both pedagogy and practice”.

![Figure 4.1: The spiral of mindful inquiry (adapted from Bentz and Shapiro (1998))](image)

### 4.3 Research Method

Van Manen (1990) defines method as the approach or strategy for conducting research within the philosophical perspective of methodology or metaperspective. As such, it provides a coherent way of answering research questions (Bentz & Shapiro 1998). Mindful inquiry does not specify any particular method but encourages the adoption of non-positivist principles such as the position of the researcher as an active inquirer, the need to make values explicit, and the imperative of instigating personal and social transformation. As such, mindful inquiry provides guidelines for choosing the most appropriate method for a particular study. This section outlines the key characteristics of basic interpretive
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*qualitative study* of Merriam (1998; 2002b), the research method used in this study, and how it is compatible with mindful inquiry.

**Basic Interpretive Qualitative Study**

Basic interpretive qualitative study seeks to understand: (i) how people interpret their experiences; (ii) how they construct their worlds; and (iii) the meaning they attribute to their experiences. As Merriam (2002b:38) states, “the overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences”. To achieve this, basic interpretive qualitative study can incorporate elements from any components within mindful inquiry (phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory and Buddhism) as well as from other methods of non-positivist inquiry *without* being solely dedicated to any one in particular. This ensures flexibility in conducting research. Basic interpretive qualitative study as used in this study features elements from ethnography, case study, phenomenological study, and critical research.

Firstly, like ethnography, this basic interpretive qualitative study seeks to understand people within their culture. If culture is defined as “acquired knowledge, including beliefs, concepts, and standards, organized by cognitive structures that people use to function properly in a cultural context” (Merriam & Muhamad 2002:41), then this study attempts to make sense of Buddhist ways of thinking that may lead to sustainable behaviour. Similarly, if ethnomethodology stresses the importance of how tacit or common-sense rules are created and used to guide everyday activities in social life (Bogdan & Biklen 1982; Neuman 2003; Pollner & Emerson 2001; Travers 2001), then this study also includes this element from ethnomethodology. However, basic interpretive qualitative study does not feature long-term immersion in the field (Fetterman 1998; Lofland 1982) or participation in cultural events (Brewer 2000) or have sufficient scope for a full sociocultural interpretation (Krenske & McKay 2002; Merriam 2002b) as would be expected in most ethnographic and ethnomethodological studies.

Secondly, like case study, this basic interpretive qualitative study regards the natural context as indispensable (Yin 1994). This is similar to Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) assertion that:

If multiple realities are assumed, and they are dependent on the time and context of the constructors who hold them, it is essential that the study be carried out in the same time/context frame that the inquirer seeks to understand. If some other frame is used, for example, a laboratory, the findings (understandings) will not

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Footnote:

6 Lofland (1982:8) stresses the need to attain “intimate familiarity” through deep immersion. But he also concedes that a possible though less ideal alternative to gathering data is to conduct “long, diverse, open-ended, semistructured conversations” with participants of the phenomenon of interest. However, importance is still place on spending a large amount of time covering a wide range of topics on different levels as a mean of gaining intimate familiarity.
Like case study, this basic interpretive qualitative study is also viewed as a “comprehensive research strategy” (Yin 1994:13) where a variety of techniques is used to illuminate complexities within the field of investigation. However, case study “allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work” (Bell 1999:11). Thus, it is more narrowly focused on a particular system especially when that system is a bounded system (Burns 2000; Merriam 1998) - that is, when it is clearly defined. In this research, the boundary is less clear given the multidimensionality of Buddhism, the multiplicity of influences on participant lives and the interdependent interactions with society.

Thirdly, like phenomenological research, this basic interpretive qualitative study also examines deep experiences in the lives of people. Of particular concern in this study are the notions of contentment, happiness, well-being, awareness and personal transformation and how these might impact sustainability. However, experiences are not the only realm of the study – nor would there be enough time or technical expertise – because it is also concerned with mental constructs, behaviour, change and socialisation. In short, this study does not strive to find the essence of experience; in any case, the idea of ‘essence’ is alien to Buddhism which would regard them as mental constructions and therefore not real. However, because the philosophy of phenomenology provides a foundation for all non-positivist science including mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro 1998), this research shares many of its ideals.

Lastly, like critical research, this basic interpretive qualitative study is a political act not an objective science in the mould of positivism (Ezzy 2002). Its goal is to encourage change toward sustainability through exploration of alternative methods in personal transformation and structural reform. It is not value neutral and, from the outset, sees systemic sustainability as the most urgent imperative of humanity. However, although critical in nature, it does not involve a participatory action component. While an action component was considered in the beginning, the nascent state of theoretical development, resource constraints and the relative lack of precedence made it unfeasible.

In summary, basic interpretive qualitative study as used in this study embodies the spirit of mindful inquiry and utilises elements from several methods of non-positivist inquiry. It is consistent with mindful inquiry because, in examining a phenomenon, it emphasises 1) the understanding of meaning

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7 Further exploration into Buddhist experiences and consciousness may require new methods and techniques – see Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences (Braud & Anderson 1998) for a description.
through a constructionist perspective, 2) a phenomenological view of subjective experience, and 3) the examination of the nature of interaction among individuals and between individuals and the larger context of society. In addition, it regards “the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis [stress in original]” (Merriam 2002c:5). Its purpose is to understand the participants, their experience and their behaviour within the culture of Buddhism. As Burns (2000:11) asserts, the task of the researcher is “to capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of the world, to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants. It is the lifeworld of the participants that constitutes the investigative field”.

4.4 Research Techniques and their Application

This section outlines the research techniques used for data gathering and data analysis. According to Merriam (1998), only qualitative techniques are appropriate in basic interpretive qualitative study because only qualitative techniques allow the researcher 1) to be sensitive to the context, 2) to be flexible adapting as the situation requires, 3) to consider the context in its totality, 4) to pick up other information such as nonverbal clues, and 5) to analyse, clarify or explore the phenomenon as the research unfolds. In this study, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation and document collection. Analysis proceeded via an exploration of categories, patterns and themes using the constant comparative method. The end result is detailed description in which the interpretation is viewed as arising from both the researcher and participant in a co-creative process.

4.4.1 Data Collection Techniques

As indicated above, data were collected in the following ways: in-depth interviews, participant observation and collection of documents.

In-depth interviews

DeMarrais (2004:54) defines an interview as “a process in which a researcher and a participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study”. Another way of understanding the interview is as “a face to face verbal interchange in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons” (Maccoby & Maccoby 1954, in Minichiello, Aron, Timewell & Alexander 1995:62). The interview attempts to obtain information that cannot be directly observed, as Patton (2002:341) argues:

We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions…. [or] behaviors that took place at some point in time…. [or] situations that preclude the presence of an
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observer….[or] how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask questions about these things.

The interview is commonly used in qualitative research because it allows a large amount of data to be collected within a relatively short period of time (Marshall & Ross 1995) and because it is flexible, iterative and continuous allowing the researcher to respond to unpredictable situations (Rubin & Rubin 1995). It is ideally suited to this study where the topic is complex with many interrelated themes and variables whose links have not been examined before.

There are three basic types of research interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Minichiello et al. 1995). The structured interview involves standardised questions often with a fixed choice of answers, is associated with statistical surveys and opinion polling, and is unsuited to qualitative research. By way of contrast, semi-structured and unstructured interviews are considered in-depth interviews whose goal is to obtain “deep” information where “deep” refers to “personal matters, such as an individual’s self, lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective” (Johnson 2002:104). Unstructured interviews follow no fix pattern or are defined by particular issues and hence resemble informal conversations. They are used for exploratory purposes when little is known about the phenomenon under research allowing formulation of questions for subsequent interviews (Merriam 1998). They are also important in understanding shared values of a group and maintaining cordial relationship with participants (Fetterman 1998). Semi-structured interviews examine pre-defined issues but allow participants to provide their own unique perspectives (Merriam 1998). This is achieved through open-ended questions where wordings and orderings are not fixed; flexibility is retained in order to respond to changing circumstances or to follow new leads and issues (Burman 1994; Merriam 1998). Semi-structured interviews were the main data gathering tools used in this study although certain parts of some interviews bore a close resemblance to unstructured interviewing.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) highlight several characteristics of in-depth interviews that differ from other techniques of data collection. Firstly, in-depth interviews are similar to conversations. Like in ordinary conversation, topics and questions are not rigidly prescribed but are invented anew as the interview proceeds. However, unlike an ordinary conversation, the task of the researcher is to listen intently “to hear the meaning of what is being said” and, hence, be able to pick up key words, ideas and themes as well as what might be missing (p.7 - stress in original). This allows detailed description to emerge. Secondly, in-depth interviews concern exploring the world of the participant, the shared meaning of experiences and interactions. It is about paying attention to “the symbols and metaphors with which people describe their worlds” (p.8). In this way, the unique perspective of the participant can be
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understood. Thirdly, the interview participant is regarded as more of a partner than a research subject. Both the researcher and the participant maintain the conversation flow and it is acknowledged that the participant has the right to shape or take over control of the direction of the discussion. Thus, the interview becomes a unique occurrence that can be considered “a window on a time and a social world that is experienced one person at a time, one incident at a time” (p.11).

The knowledge obtained from in-depth interviews is not positivist ‘reality’. Rather, it is best understood as “the social justification of belief rather than as accuracy of representation” (Kvale 1996:37). This knowledge is socially constructed and, hence, the interview is the “construction site of knowledge” (Kvale 1996:42) where the interaction between the researcher and the participant determines what is constructed. To put it another way, conversation is the way social reality is constituted. Hence, Mishler (1991) stresses that even the innocent question in an interview should be treated as part of knowledge construction:

Rather than serving as a stimulus having a predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intended to elicit a response, a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which its meaning and that of its answers are created in the discourse between interviewer and respondent as they try to make continuing sense of what they are saying to each other. (p.53-54)

Mishler provides compelling evidence that the participant is often active in shaping the question reframing it from his or her perspective. Thus, he argues that “meanings in discourse are neither singular nor fixed, as they are in a fully specified computer program or in a closed set of mathematical axioms and theorems” and that “terms take on specific and contextually grounded meanings within and through the discourse as it develops and is shaped by speakers” (Mishler 1991:64). What emerges from an interview is something he terms “the joint construction of meaning” (p.52). In concurrence, Holstein and Gubrium (1995:39) regards the interview as a place where the “active interviewer” is engaged in “inciting respondents’ answers” and this “activates narrative production”.

Another important issue in in-depth interviewing is the relationship between the researcher and the participant. As Arksey and Knight (1999:101) note, “the quality of the data is dependent on the quality of the relationship built up between the interviewer and the interviewee”. Therefore trust and rapport must be established through openness, politeness, being well-versed in background knowledge, and a degree of self-disclosure appropriate to the situation. It is also paramount to develop a shared understanding of the nature of the interview, be clear of the norms operating, and ensure the credibility of the researcher (De Santis 1980). Good rapport will endow the researcher with empathy in order “to put him- or herself in the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their perspective, rather than impose the world of academia and preconceptions upon them” (Fontana & Frey 1994:367).
Empathy also means that the researcher is not a value-neutral observer – even if such a thing was possible or desirable - but rather somebody who strives to gain depth and intensity, including uncovering any negative aspects, while maintaining balance to obtain multiple perspectives of a story (Rubin & Rubin 1995).

Benefits to both the researcher and the participant can arise because the relationship in an in-depth interview can be strong, sometimes to the point of friendship. For the researcher it can be a rewarding experience (DeSantis 1980). For the participant, it can lead to a greater understanding of him- or herself:

What generally happens when we tell a story from our own life is that we increase our working knowledge of ourselves because we discover deeper meaning in our lives through the process of reflecting and putting the events, experiences, and feelings that we have lived into oral expression. (Atkinson 1998:1)

The in-depth interview certainly has the capacity to change the lives - or at least certain life perspectives - of the researcher and the participant. Such change would be consistent with the goals of mindful inquiry and indeed occurred in this study, especially in the mind of the researcher who was profoundly influenced by the views of the participants as to incorporate them into his worldviews (this is clearly visible in Chapter 8).

Despite the benefits, the in-depth interview can be challenging. There is always a large amount of information within even a short conversation passage and the researcher and participant have little time to fully digest or reflect on what is going on:

The respondent encounters salient data in the midst of a very crowded and complicated speech event. There is virtually no opportunity for unhurried identification or reflection. There is also the pressing knowledge that this opportunity will never come again. What the investigator does not capture in the moment will be lost forever…. [Hence,] mistakes are easy to make and impossible to rectify. (McCracken 1988:38)

To succeed Marshall and Rossman (1999:110) assert that the researcher “should have superb listening skills and be skillful at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration”.

Similarly, Arksey and Knight (1999) ask the researcher to be an active listener which involves paying attention to not only what is being said but how it is said, looking out for telltale words or signals, and identifying gaps, omissions and incomplete replies.

Another complication with the in-depth interview is that it is subjected to “the vagaries of informant’s interpretation and presentation of reality” (Minichiello et al. 1995:72). This means that participants may not be willing to share all information needed, can sometime lie, tell what they think the interviewer wants to hear, or behave differently in real life to what they say (Brewer 2000; Marshall & Rossman
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1999). A good example is the debate over the authenticity of accounts of promiscuity given by Samoan women as documented by Margaret Mead (Johnson 2002). However, these problems can be mitigated by building strong rapport with participants, understanding fully the context and assumptions involved, using multiples sources of information, conducting subsequent interviews and verifying information with other research techniques. Many of these techniques were used in this study as will be discussed in Section 4.5.

An interview guide was used for each interview conducted in this study. An interview guide is “a list of topics and/or questions constructed prior to the interview to be used at the discretion of the researcher” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2005:145). It provides “the basis for conversation” (DeMarrais 2004:54). Such a guide tries to avoid leading, vague or overly complex questions while remembering the researcher of probes to explore particular issues further.

All interviews conducted in this study were recorded using a digital audio device. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher. A summary of the major points of each interview was produced and sent back to the participants for feedback.

Participant observation

Morris (in Adler & Adler 1994:378) defines observation as “the act of noting a phenomenon, often with instruments, and recording it for scientific or other purposes”. The difference between observation as a casual everyday activity and a research technique lies in the systematic nature of the latter required to generate or examine theoretical propositions. Gold (in Dane 1990) describes four types of observation in a continuum that begins with no researcher involvement and ends with total participation. These are: 1. the complete observer, 2. the observer-as-participant, 3. the participant-as-observer, and 4. the complete participant. However, Adler and Adler (1994) assert that the concept of the detached, uninvolved researcher is unacceptable in naturalistic paradigm; rather, membership of those under investigation is de rigueur but the degree of involvement is determined by situational and practical considerations. Hence, they advocate a new typology where the researcher takes the role of peripheral-member-researcher, active-member-researcher or complete-member-researcher. In all cases, the true identity of the researcher is always known because trust and mutual cooperation are paramount concerns. In this study, the most appropriate role was the peripheral-member-researcher where behaviour was observed while interacting formally and informally with participant. When opportunities did arise for engaging in the activities of the participant, observation was also used. However, these opportunities were limited because of time constraint, difficulties of access and ethical considerations of long-term stay with individuals in their homes.
To conduct observation systematically, Banister (1994) suggests a number of topics to consider for each situation:

1. Describe the context
2. Describe the participants
3. Describe who the observer is
4. Describe the actions of the participants
5. Interpret the situation
6. Consider alternative interpretations of the situation
7. Exploring your feelings in being an observer (p.24)

These topics not only guide the areas for data collection but also encourage a strong reflexive stance necessary in qualitative research. They promote exploration of alternative interpretations and critical self-examination searching for biases and unarticulated assumptions. Used carefully in this manner, observation can provide an emic understanding of the participants’ world and the meaning of their everyday activities (Brewer 2000) although it needs to be combined with other techniques to ensure validity (Adler & Adler 1994).

**Collection of documents**

Document collection is a systematic process of discovering data which is closely related to the topics of research (Merriam 1998). Finding documents depends on the ability of the researcher to think creatively, pose a multitude of probing questions relevant to the research and follow clues leading to their discovery in hidden places.

According to Sarantakos (1993:206), there are five types of documents: public documents, archival records, personal documents, administrative documents, and formal studies and reports. Most qualitative studies require data from documents because they:

- contribute details and corroborate information from other sources.
- provide inferences.
- raise new issues for further investigation.
- are helpful in verifying names, titles and spellings derived from interviews (Yin 1994:81).

However, documents are not necessarily unbiased or accurate and it is the responsibility of the researcher to assess their purpose and authenticity. Assessment requires that the “distance between document and reality, and the number of interpretations involved have to be considered in interpreting documentary evidence” (Shipman 1988:108). Bell (1999:112) has referred to analysis of documents as

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8 Emic refers to an insider’s perspective (someone inside the culture being studied) whereas etic refers to an outsider’s perspective (Patton 2002).
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‘criticism’ and has suggested a series of critical questions “to gain a full appreciation of the value of the source” (p.117).

In this study, documents relevant to Buddhism and sustainability, written by the participants, were collected. However, only a few of these existed or were available. Therefore, no systematic attempt at analysis was made although all important documents received were interrogated and summarised. The summaries were sent back to the participants for validation. The information gained from these was used to corroborate data from interviews and observation.

4.4.2 Data Analysis

Sarantakos (1993:300) has argued that qualitative data analysis is a cyclical process involving data reduction, data organisation and interpretation. Data reduction is the process of managing and transforming data and is usually achieved using techniques such as coding and summarising. In data organisation, the categories and themes become more developed in presentation forms such as matrices and diagrams. In interpretation, patterns, explanation and conclusions are drawn which inform the previous phases, thus initiating a cycle which continues until ‘saturation’ is reached. He emphasises that data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and that it is difficult to separate one from the other.

More specifically, this study uses the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss 1967) for data analysis. The constant comparative method was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) with the purpose of generating grounded theory, meaning a theory that is rigorously derived from data (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1994). However, Merriam (1998:159) asserts that it is “compatible with the inductive, concept-building orientation of all qualitative research” and, hence, suitable for analysis, especially the generation of categories and subcategories, in research not seeking to build substantive theory. Therefore, it is suitable for use in a basic interpretive qualitative study where the aim is “simply … to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved” (p.11). Likewise, Lincoln and Guba (1985) regard the constant comparative method as an important tool in data analysis with the proviso that the word ‘theory’ – whose purpose is “to enable prediction and explanation of behavior” (Glaser & Strauss:3) - is replaced with ‘construction’ where ‘construction’ refers to the interpretation of meaning of a particular situation (p.343).

The technique of coding is an integral part of the constant comparative method. Miles and Huberman (1994:56) define codes as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study”. Hence, codes are assigned to units of data or what Glaser and
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Strauss (1967) refer to as ‘incidents’ (p.105). Although Glaser and Strauss do not elaborate on the meaning of incident, Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that an incident must have two properties: 1) it should be heuristic, providing understanding to the researcher on the research questions; and, 2) it should be the “smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself” and therefore be “interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context” (p.345).

In the constant comparative method, coding begins by scrutinising data line-by-line and each incident found is tentatively named according to the conceptual category it portrays. This is sometime known as open coding (Strauss & Corbin 1990). During this stage, Glaser and Strauss (1967:106) stress that:

… while coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category.

The purpose of comparison is to “generate theoretical properties of the category” (p.106) such as its type, dimensions, conditions under which it operates, consequences and relationship with other categories. As categories begin to accumulate, the next stage is to shift from “comparison of incident with incident to comparison of incident with properties of the category that resulted from initial comparison of incidents” (p.108). This act tests the integrity of the categories and allows modifications and redefinitions to occur and the creation of subcategories. Thus, the researcher gains confidence in the categories that have been created. In addition, relationships between various categories emerge leading to greater integration and the development of higher-level themes.

Memos are an invaluable tool in the constant comparative method. Glaser (1998:177) defines memos as “theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships”. Memos are important because they are a form of concretised critical reflection that capture the “initial freshness” of the researcher’s theoretical notions and help clarify any conflict within them (Glaser & Strauss:107). They chronicle the development of ideas providing a trail of links between the ideas of the researcher and the data:

Memo writing aids us in linking analytic interpretation with empirical reality. We bring raw data right into our memos so that we maintain those connections and examine them directly. Raw data from different sources provide the grist for making precise comparisons, fleshing out ideas, analyzing properties of categories, and seeing patterns. (Charmaz 2000:517)

Memos are intrinsically linked to the process of coding; they relate units of data together into a “recognizable cluster” (Miles & Huberman 1994:72), and, as categories materialise, memos bring them to life as part of a larger theoretical framework. Memos elaborate on the structure of relationships, articulate processes, suggest new interpretations, question assumptions as well as inform additional
action on data collection. Finally, they are vital in another analytic act, that of writing (Marshall & Rossman 1999). Indeed, the constant comparative method stresses that writing is a fundamental part of analysis. Many authors agree with this idea. For example, Minichiello et al. (1995) describe writing and analysis as “totally intertwined” (p.273). However, writing in non-positivist research plays an even greater role than in other types of research because description is at its heart. As Walcott (1994:56) states:

> Description entails both art and science and seems to suffer more in the absence of the former, for it is an intuitive as well as an objectifying act. It requires not only a sense of what to observe and report but exquisite judgment about what not to report, a keen sense of what is focus, what is periphery, and how to maintain a perspective and balance between them.

Writing can be viewed as an inseparable part of research. In fact, according Van Manen (1990:7), “[r]esearch and writing are aspects of one process”.

The constant comparative method, employing the techniques of coding, memoing and writing, was used in this study to analyse data and provide detailed description. The categories, themes and theoretical notions generated were used to answer the study’s research questions. The written report can be viewed as constructions of reality with a view of allowing the reader to apply ideas and lessons to his or her own situation.

### 4.5 Trustworthiness

This section examines issues of trustworthiness that were integral to the research design of this study. For research to be accepted as a significant scientific contribution to knowledge, it must be judged on the merits of quality and integrity. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four traditional criteria:

1. **“Truth value”**: How can one establish confidence in the “truth” of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?
2. **Applicability**: How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?
3. **Consistency**: How can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?
4. **Neutrality**: How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer? (p.290)

These criteria have been termed internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, respectively. However, non-positivist researchers have come to a consensus that these criteria are
incompatible in constructivist epistemology where there are multiple constructions of reality (Guba & Lincoln 1989; Kirk & Miller 1986; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam 1998; 2002a; Minichiello et al. 1995; Whitemore, Chase & Mandle 2001). This study uses the parallel criteria of trustworthiness developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) because, despite continuing debate and contestation, they are still the “gold standard” of qualitative evaluation (Whitemore, Chase & Mandle 2001:527). The parallel criteria are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.5.1 Credibility

Credibility parallels internal validity but, rather than assessing whether “truth” is faithful reproduced, it seeks to demonstrate that there is a reasonably match between the constructed realities of the participants and constructed realities given by the researcher (Guba & Lincoln 1989). Several strategies suggested were used to ensure credibility in this study:

1. Prolonged engagement

Prolonged engagement is required to gain sophisticated appreciation of context without which the phenomenon and the participants cannot be understood. Secondly, it is required to minimise “distortions” emanating from the researcher (personal preconceptions) and the participants (any form of inaccurate or false information). Lastly, it is vital for building relationships and trust with participants (Lincoln & Guba 1985). However, while prolonged engagement is a prerequisite for studying a foreign culture, “it may be an overstatement for work conducted in one’s own culture” (Fetterman 1998:9). The researcher in this study is a Buddhist practitioner and has lived in both Thailand and Australia for significant periods of time; he can be considered an insider. Hence, an “adequate” amount of time was spent in the field until “data and emerging findings … [became] saturated” (Merriam 2002a:26), that is, when additional data did not produce any new categories (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

2. Triangulation

There are four modes of triangulation: data source, method, investigator and theory (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Stake 1995). However, only the first two modes are deemed appropriate in non-positivist research by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and these were used in this study.

Data triangulation involves collecting data from multiple sources for verification and to identify contradictions or inconsistencies. As already mentioned data in this study was garnered from many diverse participants and, where possible, others close to them. The second mode of method of

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9 Guba and Lincoln (1989) later proposed authenticity criteria based purely on a constructivist framework and some of these are also considered in this study.
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triangulation concerns using several techniques to gather data. Again, it is used to identify “a pattern of distortion” such as biases so the situation can be rectified (Lincoln & Guba 1985:306 – stress in original). Hence, method triangulation is valuable because it creates confidence in the findings as Webb, Campbell, Schwartz and Sechrest (1966:3) explain:

Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more independent measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced. The most persuasive evidence comes through a triangulation of measurement processes. If a proposition can survive the onslaught of a series of imperfect measures, with all their irrelevant error, confidence should be placed in it.

This study used several techniques for data gathering including interviews, observation and document collection to ensure credibility.

3. Member checks

Member checks are important in confirming correct representation of participants’ way of thinking, in bringing to surface the intent behind a particular action, in correcting details, and in seeking new information (Lincoln & Guba 1985). As Atkinson (1998) maintains, while participant reconstructions do not and cannot proffer “truth”, there needs to be internal consistency in their accounts. Member checks were carried out for each participant at several stages: after each interview, a summary was given; after analysis of documents, a summary of the main points was provided; at subsequent formal or informal meetings or correspondence, points needing clarification were raised; and, after writing each section, a copy of the participant’s story and experience was sent. In all stages, participants were encouraged to comment.\(^{10}\)

4.5.2 Transferability

Law-like generalization cannot be made in constructivist research. Indeed, Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that this is a positivist fallacy that relies on dubious assumptions.\(^{11}\) This is put emphatically by Yin (1994:10) who argues that individual cases, “like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes”. Rather, the term transferability is more appropriate and refers to the idea of “naturalistic generalizations” where hypotheses derived in a study can be used by readers as applicable and relevant to their own context (Stake 1995:85). The responsibility of the researcher, then, is to supply thick description of both the findings and their context or, to put it another way, the task is “to provide as complete a data base as humanly possible in order to facilitate transferability judgements on the part of others who may wish to apply the study to their own situation” (Guba & Lincoln 1989:242). The onus is also on the reader to decide on the applicability of the study.

\(^{10}\) Some member checks can be viewed in Appendix 3 in correspondence.

\(^{11}\) They discuss this in detail on pages 112-119.
and its hypotheses or what Merriam (2002a:28) refers to as ‘user generalizability’. A second way to facilitate transferability is to maximise the breadth of and variety within the sample being investigated (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Rubin & Rubin 1995). As Merriam (2002a:29) explains:

The logic behind this strategy is that if there is some diversity in the nature of the sites selected … or participants interviewed, or times and places of field events, results can be applied to a greater range of situations by readers or consumers of the research.

Both strategies to ensure transferability were used in this study: thick description of experiences and many types of participants from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and Buddhist traditions.

4.5.3 Dependability

The positivist conception of reliability as complete replicability is inconsistent with constructivist epistemology where each researcher constructs his or her own reality. Secondly, the context and situational variables of the phenomenon under investigation are always in flux and, hence, these “instabilities cannot be simply charged off to the inquiry procedure” because “they are at least as much a function of what is being studied as of the process of studying” (Lincoln & Guba 1985:299). Thirdly, the researcher must constantly adapt as the study matures to allow the emergence of “increasingly sophisticated constructions” (Guba & Lincoln 1989:242). Under these conditions, reliability is termed dependability and “lies in others’ concurring that given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable” (Merriam 2002a:27).

The means of ensuring dependability are: 1) audit trail and 2) triangulation. The audit trail is designed to be like a financial audit where there is a rigorous examination of the raw data and the method and instruments used to process them (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Robson 1993). The idea is that the reader can follow exactly how the study was conducted. However, in a small-scale study such as this one where resource is constrained, the most realistic option is to supply sufficient details of how the data were collected, important decisions that were made, events or changes that impacted participants or researcher, and how the conclusions were derived (Merriam 2002a; Minichiello et al. 1995). This information is provided in Section 4.7 and in the Appendices which include the interview schedule, the full transcripts for each interview, documents collected and important memos taken. In addition, each interpretation of the text during analysis is referenced to the specific page of the raw data.

The second technique to ensure dependability is triangulation. This is because a study that is credible is also likely to dependable and because dependability in itself without credibility is futile (Burns 2000; Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam 1998). As discussed earlier, triangulation was an integral part of this study.
4.5.4 Confirmability

The confirmability criterion of Lincoln and Guba (1985) paralleling objectivity has not found much resonance with other authors in the literature. In the first place, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) themselves point out, positivist objectivity cannot be achieved; rather, objectivity conceived of as findings based on the data rather than misconstructions based on opinions is the only acceptable interpretation within constructivist methodology. Secondly, confirmability is similar to the credibility criterion and it can be argued that if the study produces results that closely match the reality as conceived by participants then it is free from bias. Hence, this study takes the definition of objectivity forwarded by Kirk (1986:20) as “the simultaneous realization of as much reliability and validity as possible”. As such, the techniques of triangulation and providing a detail account of the research process are sufficed.

Additionally, a key element under the mindful inquiry metaperspective is mindfulness, which Braud and Anderson (1998:243) define as:

… a fullness of attention, an evenly hovering attention, a presence, an awareness or awakeness…. The term is nepsis, and it could be translated as watchfulness or sobriety; it is the opposite of drunkenness or lacking in vigilance.

Mindfulness was an important process as it enabled the researcher to keep a vigilant eye on himself as he interacted with the participants, theories and data. For example, mindfulness can be applied to analysis of text. Usually when one examines text, one is immersed in it at the expense of all other perceptions; one is consumed by the meaning of the text. The trick is to be simultaneously aware that this immersion is taking place, that one’s focus has shifted. This is in reality a rapid movement between awareness of self and awareness of text. The next step is to note mentally of what arises as one comes across an important event. The possibilities are:

1. Like
2. Dislike
3. Neutrality
4. Others e.g. puzzled, frustration

The act of mental noting disperses the feeling that may arise. As Van Manen (1990:10) observes:

A person cannot reflect on lived experience while living through the experience. For example, if one tries to reflect on one’s anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated. Thus, phenomenological reflections is [sic] not introspective but retrospective [stress in original].

As one analyses, one deconstructs simultaneously. This is an intensive form of critical reflexivity that occurs on a moment-to-moment basis and can only occur with practice.\textsuperscript{12} It is a difficult task and

\textsuperscript{12} Critical reflexivity of this nature can be called mindfulness and is fundamental to many forms of Buddhism. In Theravada Buddhism, it is often synonymous with the practice vipassana meditation where the term vipassana simply
virtually impossible to perform continuously but even a reasonable understanding will enhance objectivity. In this study, feelings that often arose during analysis of text were captured in memos along with reflections, assumptions and values to enhance the level of mindfulness and decrease distortion or bias.

4.6 Ethics

This section reviews the ethical considerations of this study. Ethics is regarded in mindful inquiry as an integral part of living not just research (Bentz & Shapiro 1998). Ethics plays a vital role in the way one lives, the activities one does, the relationship with one another and the process of personal transformation. Buddhism places a high priority on ethics not only because it is the foundation for harmony in society and with nature but because it is an indispensable component for spiritual development leading ultimately to enlightenment (Nyanatiloka 1980). In this sense, the ethical procedures and the relationships between the researcher and participants in this study are subsumed by this larger ethical framework.

Accordingly, the first ethical consideration is to adhere to all the rules governing ethics in qualitative research. Thus, all precautions were taken beginning with the first step of gaining approval from the Griffith University Ethics Committee. Each participant who took part in the study agreed to a research contract that included a description of the procedures, relevant information on the study and a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix 1). A premium was placed on confidentiality throughout the study and pseudonyms were used to present the findings. Trust, honesty and reciprocity (Fetterman 1998) were hallmarks in dealing with the participants. The wish of the participants to remove any personal information was respected. All transcripts will be kept in secured storage for five years and then destroyed according to Griffith University rules.

A second consideration concerns the reporting of the findings. According to Braud and Anderson (1998), ethics should include considerations of what is described when research focuses on spiritual experiences:

> Even with the best intentions, portraying spiritual experiences and generalizing about the nature of transformative life experiences can easily lead itself to accounts biased in favor of the controlling ideologies of one culture (or subculture) and prejudiced against others. Already, world history is littered with accounts of the misuse of spiritual and religious authority (Braud & Anderson 1998:247).

means insight into the real nature of things. Simultaneous deconstruction is a concept I derived and something echoed by a monk in Thailand who said, “Seeing external world, I see the internal in exactly the same way – simultaneously and always”.

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13 This study began in 2003 when I was a student of Griffith University. I then transferred to RMIT in 2005.
In line with this view, this study has been conducted in a spirit of plurality. The final report, from the first chapter to the last, offers multiple perspectives of Buddhism. Several Buddhist traditions with differing beliefs are presented for the reader to compare and contrast while similarities are also explained. A conscious attempt has been made to provide equal space for each viewpoint with as little personal bias as possible.

4.7 Conduct of the Study

This section presents a detailed account of the conduct of the study as a way of further enhancing the transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study. To enhance readability and to portray the research process as centred on the researcher as suggested in mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro 1998), it is written in first person format. Four stages are reviewed chronologically although much of the study proceeded iteratively as shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Diagrammatic representation of the conduct of the study

4.7.1 Stage 1: Setting the Stage, Conceptualising the Research

I am a practicing Buddhist in a country (Thailand) where Buddhist practice is reviving after decades of decline. I am a person who cares about the environment, living in a world under the onslaught of economism where nature is viewed as raw material for goods and services. I am a human being whose journey in life has passed through many phases but that life has yet to be fulfilled. This is my historical context that drove me to seek to understand how the move towards sustainability might benefit from the wisdom of Buddhism.
In the beginning, I found the task of conceptualising the link between Buddhism and sustainability very challenging. Searching the literature was difficult because the scope of each topic is very broad, and sustainability and Buddhism have not been discussed much together. Fortunately, I had encountered the work of Donella Meadows during my postgraduate degree in environmental science and this gave me the leads I needed. However, a clear understanding did not emerge until Alan AtKisson, an associate supervisor who was familiar with both Meadows’ work and Buddhism, helped sharpen my thinking. Over an informal dinner, we arrived at two conclusions: (i) the hallmark of Buddhism is a process for personal transformation, and (ii) the necessity of sustainability is a paradigm shift that begins with each individual. Clearly from this view, what sustainability, conceived in the instrumental traditions of the West, lacks Buddhism possesses. As Alan summed up in his subsequent e-mail:

It [Buddhism] is one of the few structured hypotheses with historical lineage that helps people to move to the level of paradigm shift or even beyond – understand that paradigms are paradigms (Alan AtKisson pers. com. 25th September 2003).

From this breakthrough I was able to develop the aim and research questions of this thesis through an extensive review of the literature in both Australia and Thailand (as documented in Chapters 2 and 3). The aim and research questions were then used to derive the interview questions.

**Developing the interview questions**

Appendix 2 provides two examples of my interview schedule. Interview schedule A was used for Kacy in one of the earliest interviews I conducted. Interview schedule B was used for Frank in one of the last interviews I conducted. Interview schedule A was divided into 4 parts:

PART 1: Buddhism  
PART 2: Society  
PART 3: Economy  
PART 4: Nature

This division reflected my initial thought that the impact of Buddhism on a participant’s life could be explored compartmentally – even loosely so. In fact, the real interview did not proceed according to the schedule at all. I found myself creating new questions according to the ever-changing situation and after each session (there were three sessions over two days). I quickly found out that discussing life and Buddhism was complex and all aspects of sustainability could appear at any moment and were always interrelated, something quite consistent with systems theory. Separating issues was difficult and even one sentence could contain any number of issues and, hence, judgement was critical.
Interview schedule B conducted two months later also contained four parts but shows a much more holistic approach than schedule A:

PART 1: Buddhism
PART 2: Tools for Transformation
PART 3: Well-Being and Purpose
PART 4: Ethics, Society, Economics & Environment

With less time, this interview schedule was designed for two hours and focused specifically on the research questions that emerged from the literature rather than a general tour of sustainability as had happened in Kacy’s interview. Part 1 explored how the participant adopted Buddhism and issues surrounding personal sustainability. During the early interviews I did not have a clear idea on how to investigate the concept of personal sustainability. Then I discovered that understanding the reasons why participants sought Buddhism or, in other words, exploring issues underlying personal unsustainability was one way of doing it and that this way also shed light on the deepest parts of people’s lives. To seek Buddhism, or more precisely, the spiritual practice of Buddhism and to take it to heart with continual commitment, in Australia or Thailand, is a relatively uncommon undertaking. I reasoned that without good motives such undertaking would not have occurred and thus the clues to personal sustainability might lie there. This line of investigation proved informative and often opened the way to the issues in Part 2 concerning personal transformation and worldviews. Part 3 focused on the notions of happiness and purpose in life. The questions were straightforward, although the answers from participants were often not. Part 4 covered ethics and any remaining aspects of sustainability that may have escaped attention. On the whole, Interview schedule B is much more succinct and squarely emphasises answering the research questions although, in similar veins to all interview schedules, it acted mainly as a topic guide and reminder rather than a rigid list of questions to adhere to.

4.7.2 Stage 2: Participant Selection and Negotiating Access

I decided to select only practicing Buddhists (as oppose to nominal Buddhists) as participants because I believe these individuals attempt to capture in their daily life the true essence of what the Buddha taught. The criteria used to define practicing Buddhists are:

1. The individual must consider himself or herself a Buddhist.
2. The individual must have a life-long commitment to Buddhist beliefs, principles and practices and with considerable experience.
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3. The individual must be an ordinary member of modern society as opposed to monks and other renunciants.

I believed that a considerable amount of time immersed in Buddhism was required for deep insights to develop and to validate any personal change that might have occurred. Renunciants, such as monks and nuns, were also excluded because, while some of these may lead very sustainable lives, they are not credible examples to inform ordinary citizens of the world on the move towards sustainability. Besides, monks and nuns often have rules that prohibit discussing personal transformative events with the laity.

Potential participants were discovered through my network of friends and acquaintances in Australia and Thailand. They were not difficult to find and certain people were very helpful in providing names. I assessed each potential participant according to the criteria above based on information gained through personal meeting, correspondence or previous knowledge of their history. Eventually, nine participants agreed to cooperate with some agreeing to extended visits. Negotiating access was a simple affair; most individuals were happy to become involved with little persuasion required. This probably reflected the community spirit which practicing Buddhists often shared with one another, even among those from different traditions.

I purposefully selected a highly diversified group of participants from many Buddhist traditions to help ensure the transferability of the findings. This strategy would also enhance the likelihood that a wide range of explanatory categories would be discovered. This strategy is termed “maximization” and allows the emergence of “the widest possible coverage of ranges, continua, degrees, types, uniformities, variations, causes, conditions, consequences, probabilities of relationships, strategies, process, structural mechanisms, and so forth, all necessary for elaboration of the theory” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:57).

I also decided to choose the participants from two countries - Australia and Thailand - because “the probability of fruitful comparisons is increased very greatly by choosing different and widely contrasting countries” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:59). The original plan was to interview seven Australians and seven Thais, but, as the research proceeded, I found this plan to be unnecessarily ambitious. After several interviews, I realised that my categorisation of ‘Australian’ and ‘Thai’ was inaccurate. In fact, participants were individuals that happened to be given such labels. The reality was that each participant was unique, his/her culture was unique, his/her background was unique, and his/her experience of Buddhism was unique. The Buddhism and its practices as related to sustainability I discovered could not be categorised as Thai or Australian; rather, it was personal. Therefore, after nine interviews involving seven participants from Australia and two from Thailand when a degree of saturation had been reached, I stopped the interview process.
4.7.3 Stage 3: Interviews and Data Collection

Interviewing and data collection spanned several months. I prepared an interview schedule for each participant. The specific questions in each schedule were dependent of my knowledge of the participant beforehand and the amount of time available for the interview. Below is a description of the important issues concerning data collection for each participant. However, their personal stories and further details can be found in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Uthai

Uthai was my first participant and I conducted the interview in September 2004. I was in Thailand collecting literature when I had the opportunity of attending an informal luncheon with Uthai and his wife at their daughter’s restaurant. I did not know him personally but knew of him as a long-time dharma practitioner and had heard him speak many times. Uthai’s wife, an elegant, softly spoken woman, was friendly and she immediately arranged the interview for me through his secretary, and I gladly accepted the appointment given.

As this was the first interview I did not know how much I would achieve in two hours, the agreed length of the interview. I thought I would need two sessions: the first to explore general issues in Buddhist practice, beliefs and transformation, and the second to examine ethics and the different aspects of sustainability. So I went in with that plan and the first interview focused mainly on Uthai’s involvement with Buddhism. However, the experience informed me that one long interview could provide much of the information needed especially if accompanied by careful observation and corroborating documents. Thus, I did not conduct a second interview although it certainly would have given me more examples of how Uthai led his life. Nevertheless, on analysis of the text and preliminary coding, I felt satisfied with the information I had received and was confident that it gave me a fairly complete picture of the man (especially given that I had the opportunity to observe him during the informal lunch, met his wife, knew his dharma teacher who was also my first teacher, and had another lunch with him after the interview).

Kacy

Kacy was a friend of a friend at my university. I had met her earlier, informally, and had learnt a little of her background. I thought she would be a good participant and asked her to take part. She also invited me to stay at her house for a few days and I duly obliged.

The interview spanned two days at her secluded house. The total time of taped conversation was about four hours over three sessions. I spent two nights there and during that time I had the opportunity of
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cooking with her, sharing every meal, meeting her friends, and attending a council committee on sustainability indicators, which she had been asked to join and where I was able to provide advice on a subject I had studied previously. The experience was rich and gave me an intimate understanding of her life.

Quinn
I received the e-mail address of Quinn from a friend and proceeded to contact him. Quinn had been practicing Buddhism for a long time, seemed an ideal candidate and agreed to take part in the study.

The interview was intense because Quinn spoke passionately and, as a semi-retired academic, was rarely lost for words. It lasted two hours and occurred in a austere room at the Buddhist centre where he was teaching. I did not have much time after the interview with him but was able to obtain many articles he had written for a local newspaper. These proved useful in clarifying some of the complex ideas he put forward during the interview. The long replies to my follow-up e-mails were also very helpful in answering questions I had missed during the interview (See Appendix 3, Quinn’s correspondence).

Isaac and Abby
I first contacted Abby through e-mail. I had not met her before but had seen brochures about her retreat at university. I wanted to attend but the timing was inappropriate. After making some enquiries, I decided to approach her for an interview. However, on learning about my research she recommended her husband, Isaac, instead. Therefore my plan was to interview Isaac and, if there was enough time remaining, also interview Abby.

I stayed with Isaac and Abby for two days, sleeping at their house for one night. My primary focus was Isaac and the interview time with him totalled three-and-a-half hours over two sessions. We also had many informal conversations over meals, in the car, late at night and when he showed me around a new monastery he was helping to build. I did not find many useful documents he had written during the stay but was sent a conference essay several months after the visit.

I did not have much time with Abby. Nevertheless, the short period of time I had with her was valuable. I asked Abby about Isaac as a way to assist triangulation of data. I questioned her on Buddhist practice and focused on the impact of Buddhism on her life. I chatted with her informally several times, for example, while she was cooking, but I tried to concentrate on obtaining information pertaining to the research. Unfortunately, after a sleepless night, I was very tired during the formal interview, did not cover all the subjects that I had intended, and was disappointed at myself as an interviewer. To
compensate, I tried to follow-up using correspondence and eventually received sufficient information on her life and perspectives.

**Mia**
A friend gave me the contacts for Mia. The friend had informed me that Mia was a highly committed Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and this proved to be the case. Mia was very passionate during the interview and talked freely. I was also able to record much of our conversation over lunch which lasted forty minutes. This provided a lot of background information on Mia’s life. Overall, the two-hour formal interview went smoothly and proved fascinating. At the end of the interview, I was able to meet her son, Ian, who returned home from school. Mia had not written any documents on Buddhism or sustainability and therefore none were collected.

**Zara**
Zara was an assistant teacher at a meditation centre. I had visited the centre before and was impressed by the facilities and the year-round schedule of retreats. However, at the time, I did not meet Zara. I decided to contact the centre and ask about interviewing a staff member who met my selection criteria. Zara, as a founding member and long-time practitioner, was the person suggested to me.

As had been agreed in advance, the interview with Zara was scheduled to last two hours. Unfortunately, when I arrived, she informed me that she had time for only one hour. I was taken aback and, needless to say, had to rush the interview. Fortunately, Zara was very confident and concise with her answers. This made the interview go smoothly although I did not explore some of the issues as much as I would have liked. Nevertheless, I managed to obtain one hour and ten minutes of recorded conversation and field notes from several informal conversations before and after the interview. Zara did not provide any written documents.

**Frank**
Frank was recommended by the same friend who recommended Mia. I was keen to interview Frank because he was a Zen practitioner and teacher. I had little knowledge of Zen but was interested in its practice.

The two-hour interview went as well as I could have hoped. Frank was a humble, likeable man who was knowledgeable in Buddhism and life. He was articulate and helpful. In addition, he spoke slowly making transcription simple. Although he did not offer any documents for collection, he replied meticulously to every question in subsequence correspondences.
**Rae**
I had known of Rae from my sister-in-law who was also a student of his dharma teacher. Rae was highly regarded as a diligent practitioner by many Thais within his community of practice. I contacted him and he immediately agreed to take part.

I interviewed him at his office for two hours and then shared lunch with him at the university canteen. I have met him a few times informally since the interview. The interview itself was somewhat strange. The setting was austere and dull. Rae spoke softly and did not have much to say. Nevertheless, what he had to say was absorbing. Even though the interview finished ahead of schedule, it made a profound impression on me. Rae had also written three books on his Buddhist practice. These proved useful during analysis.

**Mindset during the interviews**

While being careful to let the perspective of the participant emerge, I attempted to be an ‘active interviewer’ during all the interviews in the manner explained by Holstein and Gubrium (1995:39):

> The active interviewer sets the general parameters for responses, constraining as well as provoking answers that are germane to the researcher’s interest. He or she does not tell respondents what to say, but offers them pertinent ways of conceptualizing issues and making connections, pertinence being partly defined by the research topic and partly by the substantive horizons of ongoing responses. The active respondent may selectively exploit a vast range of narrative resources, but it is the interviewer’s job to direct and harness the respondent’s constructive storytelling to the research task at hand.

Hence, each interview took a life of its own, displaying the history, culture and experiences of the particular participant as these interacted with those of the researcher, guided by the research questions.

I found each interview challenging: there was always much to cover and never enough time; the information the participant gave could be interpreted on many levels, for example, the personal or structural level; and, many leads were generated at any particular point in time that enticed investigation. To help achieve my research aim I always kept at the back of my mind the question: “How has this affected the sustainability of the world?” It was as if I was always scurrying back and forth between what the participant was telling me and this question in order to make sense of what was going on or what was germane. Thus, this question was my overarching perspective and ensured my openness in discussing issues that may have seemed irrelevant at the time. In summary, I was always assessing each piece of information I received on its impact on sustainability and whether such impact was positive or negative; in other words, does it help transform the world we live in, its societies and environments. This was the way I operated not only during the interviews but throughout the time I was in the field.
4.7.4 Stage 4: Analysis of Contribution to Sustainability and Portrayal of Participants’ Stories

I personally transcribed all the interviews verbatim. Interviews given in Thai were translated into English. A summary of the main points of each interview was sent to the participants and comments or clarifications sought. I coded each interview according to the constant comparative method as described in Section 4.4.2 and I used memos to help derive the first tentative ideas of categories.

As already discussed, analysis and writing are inseparable. However, it is writing that is always the final act of integrating concepts, themes and theoretical notions. In this study, I discovered that this was indeed the case and that coherent meaning could only be created through the act of writing. Writing entails keeping the result of the preceding analysis in mind while constant referring back to the original data (transcript and audio tape) to bring back the actual experiences to life in order to answer the research questions. Thus, writing was the process of construction and reconstruction. To try and ensure credibility, I always asked myself whether anything I wrote was actually what the participant was trying to tell me and whether it was consistent with their behaviour and life history. When I was unsure, I looked for clues elsewhere in the data or asked the participants for advice.

Writing about personal sustainability in the life of another was difficult. It required me to empathise with the participant and try to understand what the most important issues in their lives were. It took about one month to produce the initial draft of each participant’s story. After each draft was finished, I sent it to the participant and solicited their opinions. I also took the opportunity to ask for clarifications and to maintain our relationship.

Writing about paradigms and beliefs was just as difficult if not more so. It is impossible to comprehend completely, let alone describe, all the key beliefs of a person. However, I believe that I have created a reasonably accurate portrayal of some of the key beliefs of the participants that have resulted from their adoption of Buddhism and how these beliefs have shaped behaviour. After finishing each draft, I sent a copy to the participant for comments and corrections.

Writing about happiness and purpose in life was significantly easier. Although the topic can be complex, many participants had a clear understanding theoretically and experientially of these two concepts. Again, I carried out member checks by sending draft reports to the participants.

Integrating the findings within Meadows’ sustainability framework and scheme of leverage points proved challenging. I found that many themes overlapped. I found that everything was interconnected and, therefore, difficult to compartmentalise as is required in analysis. I had to re-write numerous drafts.
in order to present the findings in an accessible way. This chapter showed me the critical role of writing in meaning-making and theory development in research.

The final reports on personal sustainability (Chapter 5), paradigms and beliefs (Chapter 6), and happiness and purpose in life (Chapter 7) contain a significant amount of details. I did this to aid transferability, so that readers can apply lessons to their own lives and make themselves and the world better. These details will also provide inspirations and transformative ideas for myself as a mindful person for the rest of my life. These details were then transposed to Chapter 8 to enable a theoretical analysis of the contribution of Buddhism to sustainability.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter described the research design of the study. It provided a justification for the methodology, method and techniques used. Firstly, mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro 1998) was explored and the reasons for its adoption as a metaperspective most consistent with the philosophical basis of this study explained. Mindful inquiry is a union of East and West and is a confluence of critical theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology and Buddhism. As such, mindful inquiry attempts to draw on the strengths of these major non-positivist research paradigms and combine them with the mindful posture of Buddhism that dictates the centrality of individual development. Secondly, this chapter described basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam 1998; 2002b). Basic interpretive qualitative study is a flexible method of inquiry that seeks to understand the perspectives and lifeworlds of participants. Basic interpretive qualitative study as used in this research combined elements from ethnography, case study, phenomenological study and critical research. Thirdly, this chapter reviewed issues of trustworthiness. It concluded that the non-positivist criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were appropriate in a study of this kind. Fourthly, this chapter documented the research techniques used in this study. The most important data gathering technique was in-depth interviews. However, participant observation and document collection were also used. Data analysis employed the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Lastly, this chapter outlined the actual events that took place during the study – the conduct of study. It described the four major stages beginning with conceptualising the research and ending with the portrayal of personal sustainability stories, paradigmatic transformation, beliefs on happiness and purpose in life, and the contribution of Buddhism to systemic sustainability.
CHAPTER 5:
THE PARTICIPANTS - ADDRESSING PERSONAL (UN)SUSTAINABILITY

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the ways in which the beliefs, practices and transformational tools within Buddhism can contribute to living sustainably. The critique of modern conceptions of sustainability in Chapter 2 concluded that the key challenges of sustainability involve radically transforming worldviews (paradigm shifts and transcendence) and finding higher purpose in life and greater understanding of happiness. Meeting these challenges is an essential step in the move towards local and global sustainability. These challenges were shown to be consistent with Buddhist perspectives of sustainability in Chapter 3.

Four research questions were formulated to assist achieving the aims of this study:

1. How have the beliefs and practices of Buddhism helped people address the problems of personal (un)sustainability in their lives?

2. To what extent, and in what ways, does seeking to live through following Buddhist beliefs and practices lead to a process of paradigmatic transformation in people’s lives?

3. To what extent, and in what ways, does the process of transformation contribute to a change in purpose and goals of life and notion of happiness?

4. What are the implications of Buddhism for sustainability thinking and practice?

These questions were addressed through mindful inquiry (Bentz & Shapiro 1998) using the method of basic interpretive qualitative study (Merriam 2002b), as outlined in Chapter 4. The findings to these questions are documented in four chapters. This chapter, Chapter 5, introduces the nine participants involved in the study and provides a brief profile of each one. Chapter 5 seeks to answer Research Question 1 through an exploration into the nature of personal sustainability for each participant and the impact of Buddhism. It highlights common issues among the participants and summarises the essence of personal sustainability.
Chapter 6 addresses Research Question 2. It grapples with the transformation process that may have occurred with the adoption of Buddhism in each participant. It describes some of the most important beliefs and assumptions underpinning the participants’ paradigms that guide life and the role of Buddhism in the development of these beliefs and assumptions. Chapter 7 addresses Research Question 3. It examines the perspectives of the participants concerning purpose in life and happiness. It assesses the contribution of Buddhism to the emergence of these perspectives. Chapter 8 addresses Research Question 4. It explores the implications of Buddhist worldviews and spiritual practices on sustainability. Meadows’ framework for sustainability and her scheme of leverage points are used to facilitate analysis.

5.2 The Participants

This section introduces the family, occupation and education backgrounds of the participants in this study. The nine participants included three Australian men, four Australian women and two Thai men. Their ages ranged from forty to sixty. The oldest was Uthai and the youngest was Mia. They have diverse backgrounds and differing life experiences. Many have postgraduate degrees but some lack any qualifications. However, all seemed well-read with strong intellects. Many Buddhist traditions are represented in their beliefs including Tibetan, Zen, vipassana, Thai Forest, doo chit and Western Buddhism. All participants have extensive experience of Buddhist practice with many having over thirty years. The combined experience of the group is over two hundred years. Table 5.1 provides key information about the participants. This is followed by descriptions highlighting the researcher’s impression of each participant’s character and providing brief details of what took place in the field.¹

Table 5.1: Summary information of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race &amp; Nationality</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Buddhist Tradition</th>
<th>Years of Practice (Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian Australian</td>
<td>Secretarial qualifications</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Vipassana</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian Australian</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>Music lecturer, Zen teacher</td>
<td>Zen</td>
<td>20+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caucasian Australian</td>
<td>No formal qualifications</td>
<td>Part-time massage therapist</td>
<td>Tibetan</td>
<td>10+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ As explained in Chapter 4, all participants were dedicated practitioners and gave sincere – some passionate – portrayal of their lives. As they did not ‘hold back’, pseudonyms have been assigned (though the gender remains correct) to protect their identities. All other names including teachers, family members, friends, cities and regions have been changed.
**Zara**

Zara is a middle-aged woman who lives in a small town on the coast of Australia. She is from a well-to-do background and is married to a professional person. Her life is comfortable and she is able to devote time to her two school-aged children without having to work outside the home. However, Zara spends a lot of time as an assistant teacher at a meditation centre where she also assists with administration.

I met Zara on a particularly wet Monday – a huge storm had accompanied my journey slowing traffic to a crawl – and the meditation centre looked grey and glum. However, when I met Zara near the entrance, she was bright and radiant, a complete contrast to the subdued atmosphere. Her silver hair sparkled as her smile beamed out happiness. She had just finished one of the regularly scheduled 10-day retreats as an assistant teacher. “Perhaps that explained it,” I thought. After warm greetings we had tea and she talked about her teacher, the Burmese Indian S. N. Goenka, whose pictures adorned the walls and desks in the office. She talked passionately about him with respect and gratitude for what he had done for others and for her life. Later on she would confide that one of her tasks was to protect the purity of this lineage of Buddhist practice by keeping strictly to the philosophy and conduct of the retreats as laid down by Goenka.

We had the interview in her office, but before that, she had to attend an administrative meeting in the room next door. For about twenty minutes I could hear constant laughter as the meeting ran its course. “More meetings should be conducted this way,” I thought. Throughout the whole time I was with her, Zara exuded joy and serenity. Her softly spoken words and relaxed demeanour conveyed a sense of calmness yet also contained refreshing exuberance. What convinced me later that this was real was
when I discovered her age: she was fifty but looked ten years younger (Z20)²! My overall impression was very positive: she was a happy person and wonderful to be around. She was dedicated to what she did and was beautiful inside and outside.

**Frank**

Frank is a good-natured man in his mid-fifties. He was brought up with one brother in a middle-class family. Although he grew up in a loving environment, he suffered poor health as a child. Fortunately, he was able to survive the illnesses which at one point threatened his life. He now lectures in music at a university and holds several degrees including a Master of the Arts. He also teaches a Zen group loosely associated with the Soto Zen tradition. The group meets twice weekly and holds regular retreats. Frank is gay, single and lives on his own in a major city in Australia.

I went to meet Frank at his workplace on a beautiful autumn morning (F32). I arrived early and was greeted by an ensemble of musical sounds emanating from practice rooms near Frank’s office. In one of the rooms, I could hear the beautiful voice of an opera singer as she rehearsed. It was a particularly pleasant environment and the wait gave me a chance to practice mindfulness walking in the corridor. Frank arrived on time but, strangely, apologised for being late. We picked up coffee, Frank generously paying for both of us, and then headed back to his office. The office was typical of its kind: a nondescript room with one window, noisy air-conditioning and many books. After an interesting conversation on music, the interview began and lasted two and a half hours. Frank talked at a moderately slow pace providing answers that were concise, deep and sincere. Throughout the time I spent with him, Frank exuded calmness, kindness and a lightness of being. These characteristics combined to make the experience very pleasant.

**Mia**

Mia is a single mother in her late thirties. She grew up in a country town in a southern state of Australia as part of a large Catholic family. She started studying fine arts at university but found the experience alienating and left to explore Europe instead. Her early adult life was characterised by a fascination with the Kabbalah, the Jewish belief system, and the philosophy of Krishnamurti, both of which she studied intensively. Later on, she worked for over ten years in the disability field, for example, being involved with the Cerebral Palsy League. For much of that time she was also a staunch environmental activist fighting to protect old-growth rainforest. At present, Mia lives in a small town where she works as a

² Z20 refers to page 20 in Zara’s section of the Appendix. Z20 refers to where the information was gained from, in this case my field notes.
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massage therapist one day a week and studies Buddhist psychotherapy part-time at a university. One of her most important responsibilities is being a full-time mother to her pre-teen son, Ian.

I had some difficulties finding Mia’s house but eventually found it. Mia lives in a quiet cul-de-sac with pleasant houses built on rolling hills. But her house - or, more correctly, unit – was a single-level, detached brick dwelling, part of a complex seemingly at odds with buildings in the area. It was basic and modest but well-kept and liveable. The inside contained an array of Tibetan, Asian and Buddhist paraphernalia that had probably been collected on her travels.

Mia greeted me warmly when I arrived, and I became at ease quickly. We shared the lunch I had brought anticipating a midday arrival. During the meal and the two-hour interview that followed, Mia gave me a fascinating world-wind tour of her life and practice. Particularly memorable were stories of her visit to India and Nepal with her son. She recounted many unbelievable episodes of how her son, six years old at the time, showed insights into the culture and beliefs of Tibetan Buddhism. I saw pictures of a cute boy with blond hair dressed as a monk, and listened to Mia’s wonderment at events that took place years ago although they seemed as fresh in her mind as ever. I finally met Ian when he came home from school. He was still cute but had grown up and was chubbier now. As I asked him about music and hobbies, I could sense that he had a pleasant personality and was comfortable with himself. It was also obvious that he was Mia’s pride and joy and the experience with him in India had an immeasurable impact on their relationship. During the interview, she would confide to me that Ian was not only her flatmate but also her best friend.

Throughout the time I spent with Mia and her son, I was astounded by her exuberance. She was incredibly passionate about the things for which she cared most: Buddhism, the environment, animal welfare and her family, especially Ian. She showed the most energy out of all the participants, and her adoration of Tibetan Buddhist culture was deep reflecting her longing to see a more compassionate world.

Isaac

Isaac is a Buddhist teacher in his early fifties living in a rural town on the east coast of Australia. For much of his career he worked as a psychotherapist in an urban environment where he combined Western therapeutic techniques with Buddhism. During that time he also established a voluntary group for violent men and their family as well as assisting profoundly disabled children. Isaac also has an artistic side and at an earlier stage in life was a community artist, sculptor and woodworker. While Isaac holds no formal qualification he is extremely knowledgeable and well-read. He is versed in, among
many subjects, psychology, psychotherapy, cultural history, language and Buddhism. At present, Isaac no longer works for a living but spends his time teaching Buddhism, developing a retreat monastery and working as an intercultural facilitator in indigenous issues.

I took a long drive to meet Isaac and spent one night at his home. He lives with his wife in a fairly spacious and comfortable house built on a steep slope. The house is surrounded by hills, native plants and animals. It has a tranquil atmosphere and a beautiful vista over a large plain visible from the bedrooms. One room is dedicated to Buddhist artefacts including a number of Buddha statues and a beautiful painting of a monk. Throughout the house many shelves held a wide variety of books and magazines. I learnt later that the house had been moved from another location and Isaac had restored it to its present condition.

Isaac had a gentle appearance that conveyed kindness. He was very generous with his time for interviews and showing me his various projects. I interviewed him on a pleasant, sunny afternoon on the porch of his house. The steep grassy slope, well-kept tiered garden and looming trees provided a dramatic backdrop. Isaac was down-to-earth yet demonstrated a scholarly understanding of practice and theory in Buddhism. He spoke fairly slowly often with broken or incomplete sentences but this seemed only to demonstrate the intense reflection and sincerity in trying to answer my questions.

In the evening I accompanied Isaac, his wife and the next-door neighbours to the Buddhist centre in town. I witnessed him teach a gathering of ‘students’ for an hour or two. There, Isaac showed understanding and compassion on personal issues raised during roundtable discussions. Clearly, the ‘students’ were also his friends and he cared greatly for them. The session included prayers, guided meditation and a coffee break that allowed people to socialise. I went home with a pleasant feeling being both relaxed and mindful; it only seemed to demonstrate the positive impact of Isaac’s work. The next day I left his house believing that the combination of empathy, intellect and therapeutic know-how made Isaac a natural teacher of Buddhism.

**Abby**

Abby has been married to Isaac for twenty-eight years. She is in her fifties and has two grown-up children. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from a prestigious Australian university and has also studied education at the graduate diploma level. Most of her career was spent in the Department of Community Services of an Australian state, the last role being a regional staff development officer.
Abby comes from a different background to Isaac. Her family owns land in a southern state and is moderately well-to-do. Within recent years, Abby has been fortunate to receive an inheritance and this has allowed her to pursue the twin passions of Buddhism and social/environmental justice without working for money. In an attempt to combine these two, she has dedicated herself to the Buddhism-based work of Joanna Macy and she conducts retreats which emphasise ‘meditation and action’. She also hosts weekend gatherings at her home to foster friendship as well as serving as preludes to the retreats. Personally, she attends many retreats each year and has also done a one-month intensive workshop with Macy on the deep human ‘embeddedness’ in the earth.

On reaching the house Abby came out to greet me on the porch wearing a warm smile. She showed me my room and offered some tea which I gladly accepted. We sat on the porch and had an informal yet insightful conversation. My impressions of her were one of an affable, good-natured woman who had matured well. She had a sense of calmness and peaceful living but underneath the exterior she also had a passion for her work. For sure, the passion was more subdued than her husband’s but this was probably because of cultural differences in the mode of expression rather than the level of commitment. She was kind throughout my stay and I liked her very much.

**Uthai**

Uthai is a successful businessman with three children from a marriage of over thirty years. He had a privileged childhood growing up in a wealthy family and went to Thailand’s most prestigious university, Chulalongkorn, where he obtained a Master of Economics degree. Being a Thai he was Buddhist from birth but only encountered Buddhism’s spiritual heart when he was ordained as a monk while a young man in his twenties. Since then he has studied with several teachers and has dedicated his life to practice. He now spends much of time teaching and organising retreats.

I had seen Uthai give dharma presentations many times previously, when I attended retreats with Khun Mae Siri. His presentations were interesting and informative as he made difficult concepts simple. I enjoyed them even though they were always the same. Back then, Uthai seemed a knowledgeable, experienced meditator and well respected. He was also held in high esteem in the business community where he was in charge of finance and investment for one of Thailand’s leading food businesses. Now semi-retired and in his late fifties he seemed a perfect participant for my research.

My first meeting with Uthai outside a retreat was at a lunch at his daughter’s restaurant (U30-U31). Uthai is tall and well-built by Thai standards and has a confident, unruffled demeanour that provides considerable presence. At this lunch, he shared his passion for fortune-telling and brought a laptop
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computer and printer especially to aid the endeavour. I watched fascinated as he calmly churned out character explanation of the women in the room. His controlled passion and no-nonsense way of doing things seemed to convince everybody of the legitimacy of the exercise. His wife was also present and talking with her allowed me to get a glimpse of the nature of their relationship and the impact of meditation on their lives. His wife was friendly and pleasant and, without any hesitation, helped arranged an interview with her husband (U31).

I arrived early at Uthai’s office located in a tall building in the middle of Bangkok. Although he had secretaries and assistants, the room itself was small and unpretentious by executive standards. He came into the room on time, dressed in plain shirt and tie. After telling me about tennis star Roger Federer’s gliding movements he had just witnessed, we started the interview. The interview lasted two hours as Uthai gave me a long account of his spiritual history and quest for happiness. He used the presentation I had seen previously at retreats, but it had been updated and in Powerpoint. He gave me detailed explanations of how the concepts he discussed embodied his thinking and how his ideas developed. Although sometimes spirited, Uthai did not appear emotional throughout the interview; his expression remained solemn as he seemed to take everything astride. My lasting impression was of a confident man dedicated to his family and his practice though his serious approach to life made him seem somewhat inaccessible.

Kacy

Kacy is a semi-retired woman in her early fifties and resides in a small town on the coast of Australia after having moved away from the bustle of a capital city. For many years she ran a communication company specialising in the environment and worked all over Australia. However, she now accepts only local consulting jobs which are, at best, sporadic. Though once married many years ago, Kacy is single and lives alone. She is well-educated with a postgraduate degree.

I arrived at her home late in the afternoon after a peaceful drive. Kacy was nowhere to be seen but I soon found her busy cleaning the house. The wooden house was large but simple and had a long veranda overlooking the vast expanse of a national park. It was a beautiful and tranquil environment while at the same time modest. My room where I was to stay two nights was basic but pleasant.

Kacy had a nonchalant demeanour and an easy way of living. She spoke softly but was ebullient when something touched her heart. I later concluded that she had a good soul but also had a somewhat fiery temperament that belies the calm exterior. We chatted easily during the three days we spent together; the conversation and the formal interviews were not hard to keep since we enjoyed each other’s
The Participants – Addressing Personal (Un)Sustainability

company. I met several of her friends at a nearby house and went swimming in the ocean with them. I also attended an informal meeting of a council committee she had been invited to join. When I finally left it felt like I had been there a long time and knew her as a close friend. We had delved into moments of her past, many private and profound, and I had been privileged to listen. She was a wonderful person, a “good wine” maturing with age, and I was a little sad to leave. On bidding farewell, she said, “Thank you for bringing this into my life”, and that summed up our experience.

Quinn

Quinn is a retired academic in his late fifties. He has spent over thirty years teaching environmental studies at tertiary institutions in Australia and England. He has studied Buddhism, Taoism and Tai Chi extensively and he now teaches these in a small Australian city. He is married and has one child.

I arrived late at the Buddhist centre after getting lost on the way. Quinn is a fairly imposing man, tall and thickset. However, he was friendly, casual and down-to-earth, something I was very glad to see as I felt rushed and nervous. He showed me around the modest centre and we settled in one of the rooms containing a Buddha statue. We did not waste much time, began the interview and continued our conversation for over two hours until his Tai Chi students began drifting in. During the interview Quinn gave me an eye-opening account of his experience growing up as a Catholic and his views on how Buddhism applies to Western people. Throughout the time he showed a strong fascination for the conceptual world but also gave a glimpse of his passion as a teacher. It was an enjoyable experience for both of us and we parted in good spirit, thoughts and ideas still spinning in our minds. My lasting impression of Quinn was that of a no-nonsense, pragmatic and erudite man that typified his Australian cultural heritage.

Rae

Rae is a Thai man in his early forties. He has a postgraduate degree in engineering and has been teaching for around twenty years at a university in Bangkok where he obtained his degrees. He earns a modest government salary and lives a simple life with his wife and pre-teen son.

I visited Rae at the university campus where he teaches. It was not a particularly pleasant environment – a sprawling concrete jungle where buildings were difficult to find. When I finally reached his office, I found him alone and seemingly idle. Although polite, he spoke little and did not smile giving an impression of aloofness that was somewhat unnerving. We moved to a large meeting room and talked for one and a half hours. During that time, he was always placid except for an occasionally raised voice
or restrained chuckle. Fortunately, my apprehensive first impressions were mistaken because Rae was a willing participant and his replies were candid. He was simply a man with no pretence and of few, but sincere, words. Beneath the cold demeanour he possesses an assuredness and uncommon sense of equanimity.

5.3 Personal Sustainability, Impediments and Impact of Buddhism

This section directly answers research question 1. It explores the notion of personal sustainability – the ability to achieve psychological well-being in the context of sustainability. Personal sustainability is the inner dimension of sustainability. It is about achieving harmony within oneself and with others to allow the attainment of full human potential. It is the foundation for living happily and with grace and serenity.

At the beginning of the research I was unclear how personal sustainability could be approached satisfactorily in a research interview setting. However, as I began to probe the reasons why the participants had sought Buddhism as a guide to their lives, I found that discussing the subject often focused their attention on the deepest problems that were or had been ailing them. Thus, I was able to conceptualise the task of exploring personal sustainability as an investigation of the impediments to personal sustainability. In other words, understanding the major obstacles or barriers to life and how they were overcome was the key to understanding personal sustainability.

The following sections present the personal sustainability stories of the nine participants. Each follows a similar format exploring the issues of: 1) impediments to personal sustainability, 2) meeting Buddhism, and 3) the impacts of Buddhism in their lives. The only exception to this is the story of Rae (Section 5.3.9) which describes his journey to discover the right form of Buddhism for him and the suffering he met along the way. While all three common issues are discussed, this format allows a more detailed description of Rae’s path to personal sustainability.

5.3.1 Mia

Mia grew up with five siblings in a rural town. Although her family was well-to-do – her father was a prominent lawyer – she endured a lonely childhood with few friends (M5). She just did not fit in and her rebellious nature and disdain for the status quo exacerbated the situation. As Mia recalls:

Yes, I’ve always questioned really deeply which has annoyed my family profoundly. It still does. They just call me ‘the intense one’. (M3)
This questioning attitude often put her in an awkward position with her family whose conservative Catholic culture emphasised conformity over freedom.

**Impediments to Personal Sustainability**

For Mia, one of the most important issues that prevented personal sustainability was anger. It overwhelmed her life and made much of it unbearable:

> Gosh, just about anything made me angry before. I didn’t know necessarily that I was an angry person before. It was a very smouldering underneath anger, and sometime an explosive anger but more of a constant state of anger. (M9)

Strangely, her anger would arise without any particular reason:

> … I’m an angry person no matter what the world did I got angry at it. It was a bit more like that, although that might not be quite the case with everything but with a lot of things. (M10)

The simmering anger seemed uncontrollable finding different ways to explode. To illustrate this, she cited the example of how an everyday driving experience was always precariously close to becoming a violent conflict:

> If somebody drove out in front of me … like they cut me off or came out of a driveway and cut me off and they were obviously cutting it too close to being in my car, I would get so angry that I would drive very close to that car and be tooting, “Wahhhhh!” [loud, intensely aggravated tone] you know. If they stopped I would probably want to get out and a have a fight - not that I’ve ever did that - but I would want to, you know. I would get very angry at that situation. (M10)

Although she did not mention any specific incident, these kinds of events probably happened often in her life. Another example concerned her son and how she would react to any signs of disobedience with indignation leading to outbursts:

> … I was so isolated in my self-grasping and self-cherishing that I would see it as he’s challenging my authority and he’s stepping out of line. And it would be … angry. My anger would come out; it would find all these justifications to be angry. And it wouldn’t be about Ian getting back on track. (M14)

This meant that, instead of focusing on the problem and understanding the situation, Mia would act out of her anger. The result would be Ian going into reciprocal anger or him choosing to ‘close down’ all together - both unintentional, detrimental outcomes (M14). This souring of the relationship between Mia and her son is just a microcosm of the impact of anger on her life. On the larger scale, anger was probably the major factor in Mia’s social isolationism (M12-13, M3) that often reinforced the anger and another associated emotion, fear (M12). While she was “ferociously angry at everything” (M13) she could no longer understand other people or relate to the world in a purposeful way. Mia came to realise that she had to deal with this issue to gain momentum toward personal sustainability or face a volatile future filled with suffering and distraught relationships.
What caused the anger that was such an impediment to personal sustainability? A violent family culture that conditioned Mia during her childhood was the main cause of her plight. Firstly, her father was abusive and doled out physical violence on the children:

> My father was a very violent man. He used to whip us with belts and kick, you know, kick us across the room and beat us. We were pretty well beaten as kids. (M15)

In addition, there was sexual abuse (M28). The impact of both of these created severe mental scarring, as this passage reveals:

> Interviewer: That hurts when you’re a kid psychologically.

> Mia: Ah, on many levels ... it’s so destructive, and one of the worst levels is that you want your dad to love you. And you feel very unlovable at that point especially with stuff he would say about: “This is your fault that I’m doing it.” It was never about his stuff, you see. So to start to think you’re inherently bad. (M15)

The shame and blame tactic used by Mia’s father fostered feelings of guilt and of not being good enough (M15-16). These have remained until today and still emerge when she tries to grapple with them in therapy:

> There’ll be pain in here or something, and my type of therapy is I’d move into there and I’d be a little girl held down and whipped by my dad with a big belt at the age of three thinking, “I’m bad.” You know, “I’m bad” because he’s saying, “You’re bad! Bad!” I can hear him just angry, and then that is what I learnt in a lot of ways. (M15)

To make matters worse, there was widespread alcohol abuse in the family as both of her parents used it liberally (M19, M16). Indeed, alcohol was something that every family member was expected to indulge in. Mia recalls how her family responded with incredulity when she tried to give up alcohol:

> When I stopped drinking alcohol when I was 22 or 23, my mother would say to me in the afternoon when she was pouring everyone a glass of wine on weekends or whatever, “Are you having a glass of wine?” and I’d say, “Ah, no thanks,” and they’d say, “What’s wrong? Are you sick?” And I’d be, like, I just don’t want to be not conscious any more. I don’t want to be not aware. I like being aware. And they were like, “Ah.” They didn’t even like me talking like that. (M3)

It was not surprising that this ultra-conservative attitude, which was used to stave off any threats to the status quo, compounded an already dire situation. Unfortunately, this attitude also pervaded in much of the local community. Thus, from an early age, Mia developed “methods to try and shut myself up, [and] to stop seeing the way I did” (M4). One of the methods she used was a habit of over-eating. She called another coping mechanism she used “disassociation”. This involved numbing her mind in order not to feel painful experiences (M20).
In summary, Mia’s unfortunate childhood caused an immense amount of pain as well as psychological disturbances:

I was a damaged person; I was a very beaten, damaged person. I’ve been raped and beaten as a child, you know. I was damaged ... I was mental, like not balanced in a lot of ways. (M28)

A key component of that childhood, her distraught relationship with her parents, led Mia to develop a smouldering anger as an adult:

So as a child that rejection and that disconnection from your parents is very dangerous, and very fearsome. So instead of experiencing that and the rejection from them, I learnt how to become an angry and judgmental person … and we were all in it together. (M20)

Figure 5.1 is a schematic model of Mia’s account of how anger became imbued in her psyche and what it did to her life.

![Figure 5.1: A schematic model of Mia’s personal unsustainability](image)

The various causes (abuses, conformity, alcoholism, unsupportive community) are closely linked to each other as well as the resulting emotions (anger, guilt, self-hatred) and the social impact (strained relationship with son, social isolation, lack of empathy).
relationship with son, social isolation, lack of empathy). The dangerous habits of over-eating and “disassociation” are by-products of the process used as coping mechanisms. Indeed, it is likely that each component reinforced the others at all levels. This is an example of positive feedback loop that makes the situation volatile and dangerous for all concerned. It is just as well that Mia was able to remove herself from the situation and sought solutions that ended up with Buddhism.

**Meeting Buddhism**

The anger that was a personal sustainability problem for Mia was present during her activities in environmental protection. However, during a humiliating incident when she got spat upon by a landowner, she realised that her impact on society was minimal and that, for her life to be worthwhile, she had to find a new clarity of meaning:

> As I was walking back from this [incident] it struck me that I wasn’t actually ... by stopping the blockade and by being a vegetarian and vegan and, you know, by trying to change the world and what they [the loggers] were doing, it wasn’t changing anything. And I was still really angry and so I thought I need to go on my own pilgrimage - I need to find out what the other side of it is, you know. Because I didn’t know. (M1)

Around that time she witnessed a ceremony led by the revered Tibetan lama, His Eminence Chogye Trinchon Rimpoche (Figure 5.2a) (M1). This impressed her highly. It seemed that other possibilities for existence were possible. Her curiosity was further enhanced when she attended a public talk by the Dalai Lama (Figure 5.2b) on a tour of Australia.

The Dalai Lama’s personality made an indelible impression on her:

> And it was wonderful! It was amazing! I felt that he was the nicest person in the whole world! I was convinced that this ... there was no ego present, you know. There was kindness and I felt ... just total, absolute kindness and love from this being. (M1)

Both of these meetings helped encourage her to make a trip with her son to India and Nepal. This trip contained many experiences with Asian people and their culture (M2, M4-M7). Especially important were encounters with Tibetan monks including the Dalai Lama and remarkable experiences of her son with Buddhism. Mia began to study Buddhism and eventually took refuge in the dharma with Chogye Trinchon Rimpoche, formally declaring herself Buddhist (M7).

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3 Chogye Trinchon Rimpoche is the head of Tsharpa branch of the Sakya Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and a teacher of the Dalai Lama.
Impact of Buddhism

Mia provides three examples of how Buddhism has helped her cope with anger and the impact this has had on her life. These are: 1) coping with anger in everyday situation such as driving, 2) parenting her son, and 3) managing the relationship with her father.

1) Anger and driving a car

Mia used the example of driving to illustrate how anger could appear and how emotional turmoil could follow. She described the intensity of feeling and the explosive nature that endangered herself and others. However, since studying and practicing Buddhism she discovered a new way of thinking that was less self-absorbed and more grounded in the multiple perspectives of other people, in this case, the other drivers who she had great disregard for previously:

... alright, a car pulls out - now what might be happening? They might be having a dog that has been hit by a car in the backseat and they’re just driving. Or they might be ... just split up with their partner and they’re out of their body. Or they might not have seen me. Or maybe they’re real assholes and they don’t give a shit, and if that’s the case then it’s very sad that they don’t care. And I developed compassion for their situation rather than just, “You affected me in a bad way and so I hate you.” (M10)

Accompanying this broader insight was an understanding of the suffering of others as well as a sense of compassion that had eluded her in the past:
They’re suffering just like me. I might have been irritated because my car was there and they nearly hit me. Maybe they’re thinking, “Ah, piss off!” Maybe they’re angry. Maybe they’re so distracted and angry at their children that they nearly killed them. You know, I started to feel this amazing sense of compassion and connectedness with people. (M11)

The positive result provided impetus for Mia to explore herself further; it reinforced her belief in Buddhism and provoked further study of its teachings as a way to comprehend herself and the world (M11-M12).

2) Parenting her son, Ian

Since meeting Buddhism one of the clear improvements in Mia’s life has been the relationship with her son. Again, this can be attributed to lessened anger (M13). Before, she might have exploded when there was even the slightest problem with her son’s behaviour; now, she handles these with greater equanimity and rationality. Her description of how she treats her son now when he is uncooperative compared to before meeting Buddhism elucidates her attitudinal change:

... like last night I said, “Do your homework.” He said, “Oh, I don’t want to do my homework.” I said, “Can you just put some of the dishes away,” and [he said,] “Oh, I don’t want to,” and put the television on. I said, “Ian, come on,” and then he said something a bit rude to me ... no, not rude just something in a bad tone, and I went, “Rrrrghhh! Turn off ...” But it was completely controlled and I was loving him completely the whole time I was doing it. Whereas before, I was so isolated in my self-grasping and self-cherishing that I would see it as he’s challenging my authority and he’s stepping out of line. And it would be ... angry. My anger would come out; it would find all these justifications to be angry. And it wouldn’t be about Ian getting back on track. (M13-14)

The passage indicates how hard Mia tries at being conscious with what is happening in her own mind. This allows her to project love rather than allowing unwanted emotions to control her actions. In addition, as in the driving example, this allows her to consider the circumstances or causes of events. In this case, she thought Ian’s languid manner could be attributed to tiredness as he had played for many hours after school (M14). In this situation, the result of Mia’s efforts was to accept the event as it was: a minor episode in the life of a young boy growing up with his mother:

So, now, instead of yelling at him because he’s insulting me, it’s more about a “Heh! Pull up. You know these things have to be done. And you know it will be too late when you get into bed ...” And he was completely fine. He said, “OK, mum.” He went and had a shower – cooled down in the shower and came back in. After a little while he came and put his arms around me. We didn’t sort of make up after it because it was more [like] a little adjustment. (M14)

Hence, Mia was able to ensure that the issue remained small, “a little adjustment” in her words, rather than allowing it to inflame. The result of this approach is more mature, rational and responsible parenting.
These episodes have had an impact on both Ian and Mia. For Ian, it means the frequency of being subjected to anger has decreased substantially and Mia knows that this bodes well for his psychological well-being (M14). For Mia, the fits of anger she had before were a torment because she knew instinctively that she was hurting her son: “It would feel bad, you know. It feels really bad to be an angry person. And you don’t want to hurt the people you love. But you do hurt them in the time you’re angry because you’re angry with them.” (M14) Without these, life was better. And it is likely that newer episodes with Ian where she showed control and sensitivity reinforced her self-belief, a belief that a productive relationship with other human beings was possible. Today, Ian seems a well-adjusted boy and Mia works hard at not unloading her anger, fear and negative emotions:

I have also had concerns about how I was bringing up Ian, and for all the problems and lacks I may have he seems to be doing above average at school, on all levels, so he is a very resilient and resourceful person. He seems mostly happy, and if its my mood and he picks it up I try to help him realize that this is my stuff he is feeling and not to take it on. (M39-40)

With such mindful parenting Ian and Mia both stand a good chance of ridding themselves of the conditioning that may have been passed down through generations.

3) Dealing with father

Mia had a turbulent childhood with her parents. Since her father was abusive and violent, their relationship had always been traumatic. In fact, she was terrified of him for much of her life and hated him for what he had done to her (M19). Recently, Mia attended her sister’s wedding where she met her father. Unfortunately, her sister had suffered a similar fate. She too had not forgiven their father, and so did not invite him to make a speech. This upset him and, as the evening progressed, he became drunk and started cursing liberally. As the situation worsened no one could stand his presence except the tearful family nanny who sat submissively beside him. Mia was close by but this time she viewed this potentially dangerous situation differently. As Mia recalls, the fear she had always felt in her father’s presence was gone:

And my dad [was] sitting there going, “I’m f****** out of here! I’m out of here [vicious voice]!” And I turned to him and I thought, “He’s upset not getting his speech.” I said, “Ah, you’re alright dad.” And I thought, “Wow! My heartbeat is not raised. My heartbeat hasn’t gone up.” And he’s cursing and hissing – he’s big, he’s six foot three, and very wide. “I’m f****** out of here. Rrhhh ... !” [M18]

Her father’s aura had lost its impact on her and she was able to decide the best course of action calmly:

So I actually made a decision to move to another place to eat my cheesecake [laughs]. Because I knew that there was nothing I could say to him to calm him down. There was nothing. But I saw that he was in a bad way and I said, “Dad, you know ...” I understood at the time where he was with it ... but he doesn’t remember how he abused her. And I know she hasn’t forgiven him and he won’t
take any responsibility of anything. So I just thought, “This is just a hard place to be in, but I understand where you’re at because you don’t know how to deal with it. It’s too big for you to accept that you were violent and nasty, and that you’re being very rude right now. It’s too big for you to accept this and so it’s no use for me to say anything about it now. But I want to eat my cheesecake because it’s desert time.” So I just moved to another table. And I loved my cheesecake and I experienced it, you see. So it’s not huge – they’re not huge things. But you know the next day I was the only person he wanted to talk to. [M18-19]

Unlike on many previous occasions, Mia was unshaken by the negative emotions around her. She was able to grasp the underlying causes of suffering and remain stoic. Being stoic allowed her choice. And the choice was to go on living the simple joys of life - in this case, eating a cheesecake - despite unfavourable circumstances. The simple act of not being embroiled in the cycle of hate also sent a positive signal to her father, even in his deep anger. This allowed some sense of normalcy to resume the next day. Mia credits this greater sense of personal sustainability to Buddhist practice because it frees her from the conditioning that had undermined her sense of self since childhood. Her practice was not only good for her; it also had a rippling effect on the whole family. Mia’s experience illustrates the close connection between personal sustainability and the social sustainability. This theme is explored further in later sections.

5.3.2 Zara

Zara grew up in New Zealand and had a comfortable childhood as the only daughter. Her parents were prosperous business people with a liberal Presbyterian heritage. As such, she was spared many of major suffers experienced by some of the other participants in the study.

Impediments to Personal Sustainability

Zara’s greatest threat to personal sustainability was a feeling of frustration and lack of fulfillment in life:

… I was not satisfied with my life as I knew it. I have three brothers, mother, father and I grew up in New Zealand, and had a good New Zealand upbringing. There were no major traumas in my life but I felt there was something more to life than just growing up, getting married, having children, growing old and die! ... I didn’t want to do that. (Z1)

Zara was seeking meaning in life but unfortunately her earlier experience with spirituality had been less than adequate:

I went to church until I was nine and I decided one day when I was sitting there listening to the minister that he was reading from a book. He didn’t believe a word he said, and I was never going to go to church again. (Z9)

As well as from the text, this could be gauged in her tone of voice during the interview which stayed calm and even, unlike other more frenetic passages.
Thus, as a child, she lost faith in Christianity and its institution. With the spiritual void, her early adult years were characterised by experimentation as she went through phases such as “the drug phase”, “the hippie phase”, and “the tourist phase” (Z7). However, in her heart she realised that these were “superficial” and would not provide the answers she was seeking. Nevertheless, the futility of existence she felt was immense. Describing her sentiment then, she said, “[I]f I couldn't find what I wanted then I was going to burn out with drugs and alcohol” (Z16). This state of affairs could be described as precarious, at best, and certainly was not sustainable. Something had to be done but Zara had no idea about a remedy – just that she had to find it (Z1).

Meeting Buddhism

Zara travelled to India with a friend. During the trip their relationship soured but they still undertook a 10-day *vipassana* retreat organised by S.N. Goenka in Dhamma Thali, Rajasthan. During the retreat, Zara experienced strange physical symptoms that puzzled her: there was prolonged coughing whose severity increased leading to blood coming out, and she began to exude a strong body odour that persisted however hard she tried to wash (Z7). However, these symptoms stopped at the end of the retreat, seemingly to the benefit of her longer-term health. An indication of this was the chest problem, something which had been with her throughout her life, that disappeared and has never returned. However, Zara described these physical benefits as paling in comparison to positive psychological ones. Describing the experience of coming out of the retreat, she states:

> Ah, I felt so happy [raised exuberant tone]! I felt so joyous. I felt the happiest I’d ever felt. Just overflowing with the feeling of loving-kindness toward all beings. And very peaceful within myself. Very equanimous, very calm. Yes, a just a total overwhelming difference. (Z7)

The happiness of inner peace and peace with the world that she had discovered seemed magical and was something that Zara had longed for without ever realising the possibility. Now she could see a future, and no longer felt lost. The happiness from the retreat experience also had the flow-on effect of healing the frayed relationship with her friend because “any remnants of animosity and anger toward each other had evaporated by the end of the course and we were very dear friends again, and very happy” (Z1). From then on, Zara did many more courses, both formal and informal, including a 20-day session at IMC Rangoon, the main *vipassana* centre built by U Ba Kin (Goenka’s teacher). The short period of time in which all this happened – a year in which she travelled around India, visited Burma and taught English in Japan - had the effect of cementing the habit of practice, a habit that continues to this day (Z2).
Impact of Buddhism

Zara encountered Buddhism by chance but it would have a vast impact on her life. One important aspect was the sense of equanimity that she discovered during her first retreat and that grew with continued practice of **vipassana**. She describes equanimity as “a state of mind that remains at ease with emotions or sensations … where the mind maintains a balance and does not like or dislike anything that comes up” (Z5). Zara gives two examples of how equanimity has had a very positive impact on her life.

Firstly, she finds being a mother to be a serious and challenging responsibility that entails a constant risk of losing one’s temper when the children misbehave (Z12). However, **vipassana** practice has helped her build a reservoir of equanimity to such an extent that anger is usually not a problem any more. Even if she gets angry, she says that she is quick to regain composure and take remedial action (Z13). Zara is aware that anger is harmful not only to others but also to herself. **Vipassana** is a “deconditioning process” of learning not to react to anger and other emotions and which eventually renders one “incapable of hurting someone to get what you want” (Z12).

The second example involves events when her first husband died. As she describes:

> So we’d just finished giving a course and he wasn’t breathing properly and he wasn’t remembering words and I thought something was not right here. So I phone the neurologist and he went down and had the scan. We were saying, well, we’ve been on an investigative journey and it’s probably just burn out. Went to lunch. Came back and put the scan up. And there’s this massive tumour that filled the left-hand side of his brain. It was a huge cyst on it ... It was interesting because when I heard that and I had to phone a friend who were [sic] living in Sydney at the time, “Could we possibly stay with them?” because my husband had to go to hospital. And I just completely broke down, crying and what not. I couldn’t even get the words out, and my husband who just took the phone off me very calmly and said to our friend, “Look this is what’s happened.” (Z5)

Clearly, the devastation was great and more so for Zara than her husband. They cancelled their engagements including conducting a retreat in New Zealand and hurried to Sydney. However, what happened next amazed her, as she recalls:

> So we got him settled [in hospital] and I went back to their place that night. And it was interesting because, as soon as I sat down to meditate, this wonderful ... it was like being suffused with peace. Just peace settled down. The mind became very calm, very peaceful and it wasn’t at an intellectual level; it was at a physical level. And that was something that stayed with me for the entire six weeks of his illness up until his death. And even when he died, there was no crying or grieving or anything like that. I kept thinking that something’s wrong here. You know, I should be crying. But I felt so totally at peace with the whole thing. (Z5)
This period of time during which Zara maintained equanimity in the most difficult conditions was a pivotal moment in her life. It demonstrated that \textit{vipassana} worked when it mattered most and that peace could be achieved even in the face of death. It also gave her a wondrous understanding of practice because she was able to see “the reality of life as it manifests itself” rather than being “busy jumping up and down and ... rolling in our emotions” (Z5). What would normally have been enduring weeks turned out into something totally unexpected; they were spiritual milestones that gave her strength for continued personal growth.

Beside equanimity, Buddhism has enhanced the positive sides of Zara’s nature and given her a new understanding of other people and the world. As she sums up, this has rewarded her with a richer, more contemplative life with great happiness in every aspect:

“I’m a lot more compassionate toward other people. I don’t have the need to drink or take drugs any more. That’s all dropped away. There’s a lot more joy in my life. The understanding of suffering at a deeper level and realising that we’re all on this planet together at this point in time. But of course none of us will be here in a hundred years. So you realise the human ... it's just the suffering inherent in the human condition. On the emotional level, it’s all the anger, the sadness, the grief, how our happiness is tied to what we have and don’t have. And on the physical level, that life is a progressive thing and it’s so impermanent. (Z8)

So the impact of Buddhism has been on many levels. Initially it gave Zara an understanding that happiness was possible without drugs and alcohol; there was no longer any reason to take them and she abandoned the habit after the first retreat. Continued practice gave her a philosophical view of human existence and its place on the planet within the continuum of time. The themes of suffering and impermanence fostered an acceptance of the way things are. Rather than struggle heedlessly as she had done earlier, life was about being compassionate, being joyful and being less tied to materialism. Most importantly, she discovered that the Goenka \textit{vipassana} technique dealt effectively with many kinds of suffering and attachment that came into her life. Goenka \textit{vipassana} became the basis of a new way of life or, as she puts it, “an art of living that is better than anything I know” (Z17). The overall impact of Buddhism over the last thirty years has been transformative and this has allowed Zara to maintain a high level of personal sustainability that has served her and her family well.

\textbf{5.3.3 Isaac}

Isaac was brought up in a different time, different place and different culture to Zara and Mia. He grew up in a part of rural Australia where poverty was the norm. As such, Isaac is distinctly different from the other participants. This is how Isaac describes himself:

“I come from a very, very poor background: bush people, whatever. I wouldn’t even fit into Marx’s working class; we’re peasant class – peasants, poor white
trash. I’ve got aboriginal relatives, you know. I haven’t got aboriginal blood but aboriginal relatives ... So I’m outside of what Stalin did. He wiped out the peasants because you don’t fit into the scheme: you’re not petty bourgeois, you’re not working-class, you’re not owning class. (I6)

The term “white trash” is somewhat harsh because a meeting Isaac proves that he is anything but that. Nevertheless, the point is clear: he is not a typical middle-class Australian.

The idea of community, where people worked together on everything, was an important aspect of the culture Isaac experienced growing up. Community was vital to survival. It was the way of life. This was so ingrained in Isaac that it became his modus operandi and, wherever he went in life, his instinct was to offer assistance without conditions: “So when I came to live here on communities … see something needs to happen when somebody needs a hand, I’d go and help them” (I6).

Isaac also showed an inquisitive spiritual side during his childhood. He went to many different Sunday schools to learn about Christianity and he was fortunate that, although his parents did not overtly support him, they had no objections to his explorations (I1). After leaving school at the age of fifteen, he began working in the antique trade. He quickly demonstrated entrepreneurial skills, opening his own shop within about a year. At age eighteen, Isaac sold the business and left for Sydney where his life would take a new, unimaginable path.

Impediment to Personal Sustainability

It is important to emphasise the centrality of ‘community’ to Isaac’s sense of self. Throughout the interview, Isaac seized every opportunity to expound on or link his life to the idea of community. After leaving his hometown, he was astounded by the lack of community spirit; for example, people were unwilling to help each other:

But then I’d be doing all of these things and, looking around, where’s the help? And then I found out that I had to go and ask at community meetings for help. People didn’t realise. (I6)

For Isaac, community is “everything” and has a much deeper and wider meaning than commonly understood. Without community, he believes there can be no self. Without community, all is lost. Hence, a key issue in personal sustainability for Isaac was the absence of community in places where he found himself, and the struggle to create or revitalise it.

Meeting of Buddhism

The philosophy, teaching and culture of Buddhism provided the missing experience of community for Isaac. However, his meeting with Buddhism was fortuitous after stumbling on a book in Sydney. He describes:
I was eighteen and I went to Angus and Robertson bookshop to get a book on blue and white porcelain, Chinese blue and white porcelain. I picked up a book on Japanese Haiku – R. H. Bligh’s 2-volume set on Haiku poetry. I flipped the book open as I often do, looked at what was there and there was a verse about Camellia petals blowing in the wind, and something turned over in my heart - that was it! (I1)

At the time he did not fully understand what the verse he had read was about but it was profound enough that he began exploring Eastern religions (I2). Eventually, he found himself among a multicultural community of Buddhists that included a contingent from Thailand. He started studying Buddhism and soon became an assistant to Khantipalo, an English Theravada monk, who conducted several retreats in Australia. During that time, he was an upasika⁵ and also worked at a furniture business to save money to go to Thailand (I2-3). Despite very modest living conditions, the experience of community and Asian cultures resonated well with Isaac; it was something of a “natural fit”.

The positive feelings continued in Thailand and Isaac’s recollections are filled with fascinating tales of how he found a cultural home. From the start, his ordination was special because it was sponsored by Khunying Usana Pramoj, wife of the then prime minister of Thailand. He had met her in Sydney and she had remarked, “When you come to Thailand I will be your mother,” (I3) meaning that she would arrange his ordination. She kept her words, attended the event and the ordination was a remarkable affair for the young Isaac.

Isaac enjoyed his meetings with local people and Buddhist teachers. In one episode, he found himself in a rural village as a Western monk gathering alms. His description illustrates how the sense of hospitality, gratitude and respect in Thai culture impacted him:

The first day on alms round I went out with the abbot and walking through the fields – there’re no roads – and came to this house and there was this old lady there, the grandmother of the house. She was putting food into the bowl and when she saw my hands she ... she was just looking down, she saw my hands and looked up, big shock. And the next day we got to the same place and the daughter of the house was there and ... they were very poor people but she had the finest clothes on and beautiful jewels like they’d probably got them all around the place. It was lovely that they were so moved that I’d come there to practice. So we helped their faith and it was big respect. When I tell people that story they often think, “Was she trying to marry you or something?” I said, “No, it’s all about respect and devotion to the sangha, not me personally but to the sangha.” (I4)

⁵ A person who has a shaved head and abides by the eight precepts in preparation for ordination.
Sangha means a community of monks who practice dharma for the benefits of themselves and others. Isaac was impressed by the relationship between monks and lay people because it was this relationship that formed the bedrock of Buddhist culture.

Isaac was also struck by how Buddhist teachers carried themselves and the strong bond between them, their students and the surrounding community including non-human living things. One example is Ajahn Mahabua (Figure 5.3), a revered monk from the Forest Tradition of North-eastern Thailand.

![Ajahn Mahabua](http://www.luangta.com)

Figure 5.3: Ajahn Mahabua (retrieved from http://www.luangta.com)

Ajahn Mahabua is known to be strict and outspoken instilling fear among his disciples. From the experience with him, Isaac was able to gain a different perspective seeing the man as kind, astute and humorous. What struck him the most was the sense of fun and joy that Ajahn Mahabua conducted his affairs:

On the first day of alms round – everybody is terrified of this bloke – and we go on alms round and down near the village, there’s a chicken asleep on the road with one leg up. And he turns around with this grin on his face and sneaks up on this chicken and catches it with his toes. And the chicken of course goes, “Qwerk, Qwerk, Qwerk” [imitating chicken noise] ... and he turns around and says something about the value of mindfulness ... And walking on, you’d see that out of his robes his hands going up like this ‘pphhm’: he is getting sticky rice and spitting on, rice is dropping down, he’s blessing the rice and the dogs are coming and getting it. Then he would go a bit further on and throws a ball of sticky rice over to the chucks there. And he’d stop and everybody sees what he’s done. The chicken mother comes over and she pecks the ball to pieces so the
little chicken can come and eat the rice. And then he turns and he says, “That’s metta.” ... So to me it was a big play he was doing with people. Because my big memory of him is those things, and whenever one of his students who had attained awakening comes there I would hear them laughing all the time. (I7)

For Isaac, recounting these stories was something enjoyable and meaningful and he admits that his character is one based on intuition, stories being an important way of understanding Buddhism (I7). These stories are key constituents of the idea of community. However, he was saddened that community had been eroded over time by social and legal changes that made it harder for people to live by dharma principles in Thailand (I5). Fortunately, he had got what he wanted: a Buddhist concept of community that he could make his own and adopt as his purpose in life.

**Impact of Buddhism**

Isaac lived as a monk in Thailand for over six months. He disrobed and came back to Australia. Back in Australia, community was also under attack and Isaac attributed blame to the forces of economic rationalism and materialism; these forces were depleting community capital (I6). To make matters worse, Australian Buddhists seemingly lacked the vision and the skills to create community based on the dharma (I5). Isaac was disappointed but, rather than bemoan the state of affairs, he decided to take actions. These actions are grouped in rough chronological order as: 1) Reaching out to patients as a psychotherapist, 2) Conducting meditation groups, and 3) Building a retreat centre.

1) **Reaching out to patients as a psychotherapist**

This was Isaac’s preliminary attempt to expand the concept of friendship beyond the common understanding in the West. In Theravada Buddhism, the term *kalyanamitta* means “spiritual friend” and is an essential element for anyone in the spiritual path. This is how Isaac describes how he took this concept to psychotherapeutic practice:

> When I was a psychotherapist I used the same model: *kalyanamitta*. So I was always open to the relationship with somebody expanding beyond the formalistic thing which is actually a bigger ask than just paying your money and disappearing. So I used *kalyanamitta*. So the person comes and sees me and, yeah, their life may be falling apart here, but over here it’s not. I know a lot more about this than they do but they know a lot more about that than I do. So there’s basis for mutual respect. And you meet people and you can be friends. (I8)

In the above passage, the idea of ‘respect’ is important. Friendship is absolutely dependent on mutual respect and equality in the relationship. In the Western model of psychotherapy, the therapist is viewed as the expert and, the patient as a paying client. Friendship is automatically ruled out on the basis on ‘professionalism’ as well as potential ethical problems. However, Isaac’s interpretation of his role is
much wider than this, and is based on the Buddhist understanding of the common plight of all human existence:

In the Western model, that [friendship] is a no-no. But you just compartmentalise your life and that’s ridiculous. We’re all just human beings making our way. I’m no arahant [enlightened being] or stream-enterer or whatever, but I know a few things ... So I’m open with people. I don’t know everything. We’re in it together. Until we attain awakening, we’re all mentally ill [laughs]. (I8)

The common existential conundrum of how to ease suffering is met by viewing friendship as part of the solution. Self-imposed barriers such as “inferiority complexes” or putting the therapist, indeed any authority, on a pedestal as in Western therapy stop friendship from developing (I9). Hence, Isaac’s mission during his earlier years seemed to be to reach out and make friends. It is not surprising that friendship turns out to be the basis for the notion of community and that this theme recurs in Isaac’s life.

2) Conducting meditation groups

Conducting meditation groups and teaching Buddhism to two different groups of twenty or so people in two towns is Isaac’s idea of developing a lay community of people. The sessions occur once a week every week and run for two hours in the evening. They are conducted in a formal style but with a strong element of friendship, indeed as a community of friends helping each other solve life’s problems and supporting their spiritual needs. Rather than “a bunch of strangers com[ing], meet[ing] in silence, meditat[ing] ... and then go[ing]”, Isaac works hard to foster different levels of dialogue (I8). To achieve this, Isaac uses a format which he calls “Meditation and Conversation” where there is no fixed, predetermined topic (I10). Rather, it is about current and relevant issues that each member brings up; for example, it might be suffering induced by the death of a family member as on the occasion I was present (I34-35) or the concept of personal sustainability (brought up especially for my visit, I35). Isaac provides advice from his knowledge of Buddhist theory but encourages debate among the group members. The latter is viewed as equally important because, after all, friends share their ideas. Respect for everyone’s opinion is paramount (I10). A coffee break provides an additional less formal space for dialogue. Last, but not least, meditation is practiced to ground theory in human experiences as well as providing inner peace.

3) Building a retreat centre

Building a retreat centre is Isaac’s idea of creating a monastic sangha. One of Isaac’s friends is an Australian monk who had been ordained in Thailand but practices vipassana in the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition of Burma. They had discussed setting up a meditation centre for many years. One of the major issues they wanted to address was that of displaced Western monks who had been ordained in the East (I36). Once these monks come back to their home country it is very hard for
them to continue practice, as there is no community to support them. As a result, they often disrobe. Hence, Isaac wanted to build a physical and spiritual community where there was friendship among monks and support from the lay community. All traditions would be welcome. Through relationships he had already established, a large piece of land and some money were donated to allow them to start (18). The centre now consists of two small buildings: a main multi-purpose house and a smaller residence for Isaac’s monk friend. Isaac relies on several volunteers to assist in various tasks such designing new buildings and landscaping. However, he is realistic. He knows that more often than not it is human understanding that is the biggest hurdle and understanding takes time to develop:

It’s hard to develop a sense of community. People are suspicious. Like even developing a monastery which belongs to Western forms of Buddhism and they’re sort of keeping their distance or whatever. Monks - they don’t understand what we’re trying to do. But I know that - that’s fine. Just keep going, keep going and the influence will spread out. They will understand and that’s fine. (I9)

However, Isaac is optimistic and willing to keep working toward the vision of community that he so cherishes: “You have to have patience. The Buddha said, ‘Patience is the greatest austerity’” (I9).

In summary, the idea of Buddhist community is vital to Isaac because his sense of self and purpose is deeply embedded in it. Some of the influences come from his background in rural Australia. Others come from his early experiences in multicultural communities of Sydney. Yet probably the most important part is derived from his engagement with Buddhism in Thailand and his subsequent application of its philosophy in Australia. What sustains Isaac is his relationship with friends and striving to help others integrate spiritual practice into everyday life (I9).

**Other Impacts of Buddhism**

While Buddhism resolved a major issue in personal sustainability by providing a framework for community, it has also been instrumental in Isaac’s self-development. One facet is the development of his inner strength. This came about while doing meditation with Khantipalo at the age of eighteen. Isaac was practicing metta meditation when he experienced a deep meditative state and sense of fearlessness at the core of his being. From then on, he began to understand that fearlessness was something that he could rely on throughout his life:

So even if I was not doing a lot of formal practice, that’s there is like a benchmark ... a benchmark. And it’s sort of an unshakeable foundation. Often the surface level of your mind you get involved with all sorts of rubbish etc., but when you come to a position that you’ve got to really be there, what is your default position? My default position is: “I’m OK. I’m OK.” (I12)

As life progressed, Isaac would rely again and again on his ‘default position’ of a state of mind based on solidity and confidence in self, especially in difficult situations. He gives the example of dealing
with a group of violent men that he worked with during the days as a psychotherapist. There, the ‘default position’ allowed him to cope effectively when danger arose because fear could not cloud his judgement:

... what it [meditation] does is help to build a sort of fearlessness in one and an ability to think better, I think. So you’re not afraid. What stops most people thinking is actually fear. They go into a tract and stop, stop, stop. So I started running these groups for violent men ... And I reflected on it afterwards, “Now what made it possible for me to deal with these people?” Sometimes people were threatening you etc., etc. Really what it got down to was metta practice. When you are faced with a life and death thing, your mind reverts to what a heavy experience is. What it goes down to in my life, in my conscious practice ... that’s one of the heavy experiences: metta, samadhi [concentration], jana [deep meditative consciousness] and other samadhi type states. (I12)

These ‘heavy experiences’ can only be found in deep meditative states and once there, Isaac found that very little could disturb his inner peace.

A second facet of self-development was Isaac’s ability to be kinder on himself. A poignant example was an incident where he was shopping at a supermarket and came back to the car park having forgotten to buy an item:

I came back to the car park and I’d forgotten to get something, and I caught myself saying, “You stupid idiot!” So what, one person might say? And then I’d say: “Why would I use those words? Why would anybody use those words in that tone of voice simply because there was a mistake?” (I22)

He instantly realised that he was “operating out of shame and blame thinking”, something that many people, including him, had been conditioned by since childhood. He contrasts this with “responsibility thinking” which is a positive approach based on kindness:

So shame and blame thinking is: I blame you to stir up shame in you so that, quote, you self-correct to my idea of what’s right. Pphmm! Hung on an authoritarian façade. But responsibility thinking says, “Yes, I am responsible for my actions but it is not necessary to be motivated by shame and humiliation, degradation.” It is ridiculous. Ridiculous state of affairs! In our child rearing practices, a little child knocks something over ... and, “You bad boy.” It’s not a bad boy, just someone who hasn’t got fine motor skills yet and made a mistake. (I22)

With this realisation, Isaac was able to stop being harsh on himself. Instead, he used the “responsibility thinking” approach on himself where “the language of a kind and guiding parent” addressed the situation (I22).

Lastly, Buddhism has helped Isaac deal with anger. Isaac said that his temperament is such that he can sometimes have a “short fuse” (A11). This is compounded by his “quick mind” where he can grasp situations easily (I24) and cultural background where “it all comes out” (I23). The former allows him to
understand what is going on in most situations (for example, an adverse impact on the community) but, often, he is unable to do anything about it because others lack the ability to see things as readily as he can. In other words, his energy to do good often results in frustration, a form of anger. However, through constant attention, mindfulness (I24) and dedication (A11), Buddhism has allowed Isaac to curtail his anger more frequently and one direct beneficiary has been his marriage (A11).

5.3.4 Abby

Abby is Isaac’s wife. Abby comes from a moderately affluent family. Her parents were “loving and warm” (A14). Unfortunately, her father wanted her to have the ‘best’ education and that meant sending her to a Presbyterian boarding school. Abby had an unpleasant experience at the school and felt like “being ‘cast out of the nest’ - and cast into a den of wolves” (A15). There, she suffered torments such as bullying and ridicule (A15). However, her family life with parents and siblings was secure and she grew up with a ‘normal’ childhood.

Impediments to Personal Sustainability

One day at school, she had a spontaneous spiritual experience that she would recall as “a kind of opening into the interconnectedness, the oneness of everything” (A1). Here she describes what happened and the profound impact on her teenage life:

> It was a drawing excursion outside and I was very focused and I guess, you know, single-pointed consciousness and there was suddenly this sort of sense of light everywhere ... the best I could describe it is a sort of sense that I dissolved into everything and everything ... It was momentary. It was gone in 30 seconds or less but all I could think of, because that was my entire framework, was that ... that was an experience of God. (A1)

She went to Sunday church full of expectation that this mystery would be revealed to her. Unfortunately, events turned out to be nothing of the kind as the minister churned out his repertoire of “hellfire and brimstone”. She felt a great disappointment and that occasion would prove to be the proverbial ‘nail in the coffin’ for her already shaky faith in Christianity. The spiritual experience had triggered a deep excitement that there was something more to life, something with a higher meaning and purpose than she knew at the time, but because there was no resolution it “faded to a sort of yearning” (A15).

During childhood, Abby also developed a passion for issues concerning justice in society. This was something that she inherited from her father who placed a great emphasis on “fairness” and “doing the right thing by people” (A15). The boarding school experience cemented this drive because of the “inhumanity and injustice” there. These two factors, a yearning for spirituality and a desire for justice,
were missing components in Abby’s life that gnawed at her sense of purpose at the heart of personal sustainability. They drove her to seek new ways of living far beyond the mainstream of Australian society.

**Meeting Buddhism**

In the mid 1970’s, Abby encountered Buddhism at age of twenty-six when she went to visit her brother in India. Her brother had been there for several months doing meditation and introduced her to *vipassana* (A1). Thereupon, she decided to embark on a 10-day retreat with S.N. Goenka at a centre near Mumbai. On completion she was so taken by the experience that she decided to attend another 10-day retreat immediately afterward. What she discovered there was a combination of things that was seductive and warranted further exploration. Firstly, she sensed the possibility of a new kind of happiness, because she began to see how the mind worked (A2, A15). She saw the incessant quality of the mind – the monkey mind that never stops and is often beyond any control – but also discovered that beyond this state lies “a deep equanimity and contentment and joyfulness” (A15). She also began to grasp that happiness had something to do with freedom from suffering although it would take her many years to fully understand what this meant (A2, A14). Secondly, at the *vipassana* centre, Abby found a sense of friendship (*kalyanamitta*) that was different from what she had known before:

> ... I was meeting people who I felt were really good people. I’d been living in Canberra from about ’66 till I went overseas. I went to university at Australian National University and, although I was meeting nice people who had good political values, it wasn’t congruent with how they were living. And there was something about a sense of these people [that they] were good people, that were being attracted to this [*vipassana*]. (A2)

Abby was attracted to the consistency between philosophy and way of life, between idealism and personal action, so much so that she would organise her life around Buddhism and meditation. She attended several more retreats in Europe before returning to Australia. Back home she would organise retreats bringing in teachers from around the world. In the early days, her personal practice was only Goenka *vipassana* but she now incorporates many elements from Zen, Thai Forest tradition and the work of Joanna Macy (A3).

**Impact of Buddhism**

Encountering Buddhism seemed to provide the answer to Abby’s spiritual yearning and the impact was dramatic. On coming back home, she decided to overhaul her life. She immediately left a marriage that was failing (A4). She found new friends in Buddhism and, through them, met Isaac. The pair moved to Chedhi Community deep in rural Australia. Chedhi was designed for like-minded people who wanted to live by Buddhist principles and work together in a peaceful environment. It advocated living by the
five precepts to help members avoid social malaises, such as drugs, prevalent at the time. Abby and Isaac were married at Chedhi and lived there for many years with only the bare necessities – items like electricity and hot water were not even available (A7). During the time at Chedhi, much of Abby’s life was about community-building and Buddhist practice. The former allowed her to develop strong bonds of friendship with other people. The latter imbued her with clarity and equanimity where “one’s mind just becomes clearer with oneself, and the way you get caught up in things gets less intense and less all-consuming” (A4, A15).

Unfortunately, there was the matter of her passion for social and environmental justice that Buddhism did not seem to address at the time. Therefore, practice and activism remained largely separate:

I hadn’t made the connection between the personal and the political, if you like, or environmental in such a strong sense before. There’d been like there’s my practice and that’s what I do when I’m sitting in a retreat or when I’m practicing at home ... essentially what you do on the cushion and then it flows on into you hopefully being a bit calmer in your life. (A8-A9)

Practice had at best a mild link with activism because it helped to quieten the mind. However, Abby was not satisfied. Fortuitously, she was able to unify the two through the work of Joanna Macy. Around 20 years ago, she attended a retreat with Pat Flemming, a student of Macy. There, she was taught spiritual exercises involving the four brahmaviharas (boundless states or qualities of the Buddha), namely, metta (loving-kindness), karuna (compassion), mudita (altruistic joy), and upekha (equanimity). Although Abby had known about these four qualities, Macy’s interpretation specifically for activism was much more powerful. Each exercise was done with another person sitting opposite. This is how Abby describes the impact of the exercises:

metta: “… that sense of sharing loving-kindness” but “it made it really more powerful to look into the face of someone opposite and connect at a deep heart, loving-kindness level with someone.” (A8)

karuna: “… looking into the face of a person and seeing in their face the sorrows that are there and the untold sorrow that they may have never shared with another person.” (A8)

mudita: “... there was that lovely sense of joy in the joy of others and the strengths and the gifts that this person might have to share with the rest of the world, what they hadn’t even realise that they could bring forth in the world.” (A8)

upekkha: “… she [Macy] evoked the image of the net of Indra and she says something like, ‘Out of this vast web you cannot fall. No personal stupidity or

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6 Traditionally, Theravada Buddhism tends to emphasise individualistic practice with the goal of enlightenment as the prime objective of individuals. Even with the rise of so-called ‘engaged’ Buddhism, this culture dominates.

7 Macy has been influenced by both Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism. Throughout her life, she has sought to use Buddhism as an instrument to further social development most notably in her involvement at Sarvodaya (see http://www.joannamacy.net).
failure or any lack of generosity or anything on your part can ever sever you from this living web of life. For that is what you are.” ... it was like a real sense of coming home to the whole of life in a very deep way.” (A8)

These and other exercises as well meditations and ways of thinking helped Abby develop a stronger sense of interconnectedness between herself and society. She realised that nothing could be compartmentalised: practice, self-development, engagement and life were inextricably linked as one:

So that made that [interdependence] really clear to me ... it made it clear that, even without taking it into the social or justice or environmental context, practice flowed throughout the whole of life, and was not just a thing that you did when you sat down and closed your eyes. (A9)

It was therefore reasonable in her mind that practice was as much about making the world a better place as a personal spiritual journey. This unification strengthened her belief in Buddhism and she began to delve into Buddhist literature. Buddhism was now instrumental in a more effective activism albeit one based on greater compassion and empathy. It combined her yearning for meaning with her passion for justice.

5.3.5 Uthai

Uthai grew up in a wealthy merchant family in Bangkok. As such, he had a privileged childhood attending private school and being chauffeured from places to places (U2-U3). He was able to study economics at Chulalongkorn, the most prestigious university in Thailand.

Impediments to Personal Sustainability

Although he was well cared for as a child, Uthai received little freedom because he was always closely watched. This meant that he could not do the things that his friends did and, thus, had a limited experience of the world. The opportunity to explore finally arrived when he entered University and was rewarded with a car and a monthly salary from his father. Uthai took the opportunity with glee and asked his ‘wild’ friends to take him to all the places possible. They went to many bars, nightclubs and massage parlours and engaged in all the activities that young men did in those days. Yet Uthai was not fully satisfied. Although he derived a certain amount of pleasure from doing these things, he could not help feel that there was something missing, that a greater kind of happiness was possible:

They would ask me, “Having fun?” and I’d reply, “Yes. Fun. But was there something even more fun?” It was as if, in my mind, I was telling myself that this is not enough, there was more. So they took me to more massage parlours and when I came down I smiled and I told my friend it was good fun ... But in my mind I wondered whether there was something better? I felt that it did not yet fulfill my heart. (U3)
So they went to more places in the city until there was no more. Unfortunately, Uthai was still not satisfied and the yearning continued as strong as ever:

... the feeling always remained in my mind that there had to be something else, something more that I didn’t know. It was like ... it was not full-on enough for me. It was not enough happiness for me. (U3)

However, since he had experienced everything that was available according to his friends there was not much he could do. So he continued his studies.

Meeting Buddhism

On obtaining a Master degree, he served as a conscripted officer in the army’s finance department. During that time he took a one-month leave to become ordained in preparation for marriage, as was the custom for Thai men at the time. As a monk he was bored by the seemingly lack of any worthwhile activities (U1-U2). All monks did were eat, sleep, pray and go on alms rounds – things he considered futile for young men to be engaged in as far as national development was concerned. With three days left, he went to his teacher to confide his disillusionment. What he heard from his teacher would change his attitude toward Buddhism from one of disdain (U4) to one of lifelong commitment.

The teacher informed Uthai that there was one element missing from the list of what monks did. That fifth element was bhavana meaning mental development. He then proceeded to teach meditation using the mantra of ‘buddho’ (U2). Uthai was not convinced by the first experience of sitting meditation and so he took it upon himself to prove whether sustained use of the mantra was really something special. With this commitment, he recited ‘buddho’ in his mind for the next three days during everything he did, for example, during alms rounds, during eating and during bathing. For that whole period of time, he refrained from talking to other monks. On one evening, he experienced something entirely new:

... before I went to bed I went to sit and meditate with the same ‘buddho’ but now there was a different feeling as oppose to in the morning when I started ‘buddho’. There was the feeling of light body, running tears, body hair standing up, and a weird kind of happiness ... a weird kind of happiness that was ‘wong wong’ [hollow sound indicating emptiness, eeriness and strangeness]. It was like quiet and lonely-ish and ‘wong wong’. I’ve never felt this way before. (U2)

Perplexed, Uthai went to see the teacher to solve the mystery and was told that these were some of the joyful experiences in meditative states. They were common happenings when the mind began to settle down and were indications of the first stage. Uthai was dumbfounded when he heard the terms ‘the first stage’ as he describes here:

Ah, what did he say, “The first stage!” [laughs]. So I thought in my mind that if this is the first stage … that means that when I was nightclubbing I can't imagine

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8 Bhavana is often translated as meditation but should be more correctly understood as mental development.
what level that was! Not even close [laughs] … So I said I don’t know what level it was but even at this level I was very happy … I mean really, really happy … truly. The previous experiences of happiness couldn’t even begin to compare with this happiness. (U3-U4, stress in original)

Quite simply, it was a shock to him that such bliss was only the beginning and, even at that level, it was incomparably more fulfilling than the happiness derived from physical, sexual or other sensory pleasures he had known before. Immediately, he understood that this was the kind of happiness he had longed for and that had been missing during those youthful years at university (U3). From then on, dharma became his passion as he sought guidance to attain and increase the happiness he had discovered.

**Impact of Buddhism**

It would take years for Uthai to fully comprehend the concept of happiness in Buddhism. Even with good guidance, only trials and tribulations can teach the heart. What Uthai would discover was the immense power of mindfulness and its ability to free the jai from human sufferings. Jai is the Thai word Uthai uses often and is usually translated as mind, heart or spirit. However, the English equivalent fails to do it justice and jai is best understood as the consciousness that feels or acknowledges any sensation or emotion. In Theravada Buddhism, the understanding and training of jai is the key essence.

On leaving of monkhood, Uthai’s first step of spiritual exploration was to work with a new teacher with roots in the Thai Forest tradition (U4). He was sent up the mountain to a retreat area where he used the same bhavana technique of ‘buddho’ recitation. He remained there for five days sleeping minimally and staying with the mantra as much as possible. Walking meditation was the main activity to ward off the wandering of the mind but on occasions when thoughts arose then Uthai would quicken the pace of recitation (U4). During those few days, he experienced “great peace” (Thai: sakob) and felt that the mountain retreat “was a paradise because it was so quiet” (U5). Coming back down he was stunned by the noise – the usual noise of everyday life had now turned into commotion - and it greatly irritated him. All he wanted to do was go back up the mountain. Unfortunately, this was not an option because the mountain was reserved for monks and short-stay practitioners. Quickly, he would learn that the use of mantra to quieten the mind was not a realistic option for laypeople because it required a lot of time and little contact with other people (U5). In this light, his teacher taught him another way, that of ‘the mind knowing the mind’ [Thai: chit ru chit]. This is how Uthai explains what it involves:

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9 I have used the term ‘mind’ in the translation of the transcript.
I used the terms ‘finding the knower’ to interpret ‘mind knowing the mind’ ... This means knowing yourself all the time. Know the mind all the time wherever you go, for example when walking. Know and feel the mind at all time. (U5)

While this might sound cryptic, the concept is quite simple. Instead of focusing on the mantra, the mind is now the object of attention. The word ‘knower’ is synonymous with ‘mind’ but has the added connotation of something that acknowledges sensations, something that ‘mind’ lacks. And why must one focus on the mind? To protect it from sorrow-bringing defilements. To illustrate, Uthai uses the analogy of the snake protecting its eggs (U6). The eggs represent the mind and the snake must give full attention to prevent predators from harming them. So must a person focus on his mind to ward off any emotions or feelings that might taint it. Uthai believed that the mind was situated in the chest area (U6) and so he focused on it intently and with unwavering commitment for days on end (U10).

Unfortunately, the stress associated with this practice made him extremely tense and uptight (U6). The situation deteriorated so much that he was unable to smile and his complexion may have darkened (U8). Reprieve finally came when he attended a retreat with another teacher, Khun Mae Siri, who was teaching Uthai’s wife and mother at the time. The different technique Khun Mae Siri taught made him let go of his fixation on the mind and he learnt that objects - mind or body - could be held in varying degrees of intensity: tightly, loosely or anywhere in between (U9-U10). As a result, he realised that a more relaxed approach to practice was possible. A second insight from the retreat was the understanding of life as dualities. According to this insight, the natural state of things always appears in opposing pairs. People who do not understand this fundamental nature seek one half of a pair while avoiding the other half. However, since things must exist together in pairs accepting one half must mean accepting the other half. In other words, because things are co-dependent pairs one cannot choose just one half and not receive the other. Favouring only one side while rejecting the other leads to suffering. Uthai elaborates using examples and his experience meditating on the mountain:

... with everything in the world, if you are attached to one side or another, it will push away the other side. For example, if you like the colour red then you will not be content with another colour. It’s instantaneous. If you love peace and quiet then you will be unhappy with commotion. This is like when I was happy with the stillness up the mountain, and when I got down if I heard any kind of noise I would be annoyed. I would be irritated. Any loud noise would result in irritation. Liking peace means disliking commotion. So I discovered this and realised that this is the way things are. (U9)

“The way things are” is represented by the Thai word dhammachart and one way of understanding it is as “the natural way of duality” (U9). This was a profound realisation for Uthai because it gave new meanings to practice. While before Uthai believed that keeping a single-pointed focus on mind or mantra was the key to prevent suffering, he now understood that this was a mistaken view: suffering
was not the result of any single state of existence but rather the result of the desire for a particular of state of existence. The practice of single-pointed consciousness was a method of blocking out other states, a practice known as samatha (U11). Blocking out was not the way to happiness because it was stressful and difficult to achieve or, in the case of mantra, there was no certainty whether it could be achieved or maintained (U20). Rather, happiness was best approached by accepting the nature of reality as duality. Accepting this meant being happy with both so-called ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ states, situations or happenings. Achieving this required constant mindfulness rather than outright concentration. However, it could be practiced any time any place. So Uthai decided to combine all the techniques he had been taught (U10) in search of being as present and mindful as possible every day of his life. During that period over twenty years ago, he wrote a poem entitled Look into Yourself that summarised the path that he would follow:

Wake up, open your eyes, find the knower;
Learn from teacher, words of Buddha, guard diligently;
Keep mindful, stay with it, in the present;
Happiness eternal, in front of you, why wait;
However lived, whatever life,
no change needed, hope you know;
Knower, mindfulness, add them both;
Do it well, every instance, even better;
Dawn 'til dusk, keep vigilant, wonders cometh soon;
This way, true to those, who practice;
Ethics, concentration, wisdom, virtue
all arise, in our mind, so come try.10 (U25)

This poem still resides in his office on a framed placard. All indications suggest that it is as relevant today as it was when it was written. It states that the fruit of practice – ethics, concentration, wisdom and virtue – can be achieved by being mindful. Ultimately, the fruit of practice can be described as happiness but this happiness through mindfulness is different from even the kind achieved through mantra practice. The latter was impermanent while the former was something that could be achieved all the time. Uthai practices mindfulness in everyday life meaning that he tries to maintain mindfulness in both work (U11, U19) and family life (U21). Through this, he has achieved a level of being present that makes seeing dhammachart second nature (U11). For Uthai, the quest for personal sustainability is synonymous with moment-to-moment happiness that can only be achieved with mindful practice. As he puts it, “I have an objective at all times: How do I achieve a harmonious and happy mind? That’s all!” (U21). In Buddhism, he has found a way to achieve happiness that is sustainable and independent

10 Translated from Thai by the researcher.
of externalities. Now in semi-retirement, he lives a quiet life with his wife. He dedicates much time to organising retreats and presenting his understanding of dharma.\textsuperscript{11}

\subsection{5.3.6 Frank}

Frank grew up in a warm and stable family (F7). His parents were Christians but were “non-observant” meaning that church attendance was an irregular affair. However, he learnt much about religion from morning services and scripture classes at his Lutheran school, as well as from Sunday school. As a teenager, age around sixteen, his spiritual leanings became clear. For a whole year he believed fully in the doctrines of Christianity and felt great joy as a result (F7). Frank characterised that period as “a very real and honest experience of the spirit”, one that might be comparable to that of a born-again Christian (F27). Unfortunately, his happiness did not last because as he explored further he discovered too many “inconsistencies” in Christian beliefs for his critical nature to accept. However, the wheel of intrigue had been set in motion and Frank would continue his passion for religion for the rest of his life.

\textbf{Impediment to Personal Sustainability}

Despite being gay at a time when there was little community support, Frank’s life during his early adulthood was not unduly harsh (F22-23). Although there were some difficulties exploring his identity and gaining public acceptance, it was another trait of his that was a much greater threat to personal sustainability. This was the desire for perfection that manifested itself in every aspect of life. Frank believes that his habit of perfectionism was the result of an existential fear that dominated his early life. This existential fear emanated from his sense of self, frightened him and made him “very tight” (F21). However, when asked what he was fearful of during the interview, he was unable to answer (F21), but later offered an explanation that existential fear is “some kind of feeling of vulnerability and lack of control” (F33). Frank believes that existential fear is fear of the “insubstantiality” of existence and that it is innate to all human beings - though some people feel it more than others (F33, F22). Perfectionism is a response to this fear and is an attempt to control one’s environment in the hope of creating security and happiness (F33, F11). Thus, the perfectionism he developed during his early years was a coping instrument, to gain control of his destiny.\textsuperscript{12} Unfortunately, that perfectionism was often unnoticed or unacknowledged, and this usually lead to energy being wasted and occasionally resulted in hurtful behaviour towards others. If left unchecked, perfectionism had the ability to create unnecessary anguish.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{11} Ever since meeting Khun Mae Siri, he has been organising her seven-day retreat in his own house and giving talks at other venues.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Continuous bouts of illness during childhood, one of which was life threatening, might have been a cause of existential fear leading to perfectionism (F7).}
and increase suffering immeasurably. However, back then, Frank was unaware of the burden he was carrying and continued life as normal.

**Meeting Buddhism**

Frank discovered Buddhism for the first time 38 years ago when he came across the book *Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau on the shelf of his music teacher (F1). It immediately struck a cord with him. He explains:

> And it was like ... sometime people talk about coming home or finding your home or finding something that immediately resonated clearly. It was very inspiring. It was something, in a sense, although I was very young, I was searching for. I was searching for some form of spiritual practice which was not dogmatic which was not about a whole system of beliefs that I had to adopt, but which was about self-exploration and about coming to understand the truths of Buddhism experientially. Maybe I didn’t understand it in those terms right back then but that’s the way I’ve come to understand my practice journey. (F1)

So he began to practice *zazen* (sitting meditation) on his own with instructions from the book. He then went abroad for postgraduate studies and had further exposure at university. By that time, he had become quite enthusiastic and on returning home he established the Burkeville Zen Group (F1). It started with five members who met weekly with the aim of supporting each other’s practice. They had no authorised teacher to work with and so they had to established links with groups in Sydney. Eventually, Frank found a Zen teacher, Susan McKinsey, through this network and started to train with her formally in 1982.

**Impact of Buddhism**

Although perfectionism had been part of Frank’s life for so long, it was Zen that first highlighted its controlling power. After just one year, his Zen group organised their first *seshin* (retreat) bringing in Susan McKinsey from abroad to teach (F8). Needless to say, Frank and his friends were very inexperienced and did not have the knowledge to arrange what is a complex and highly ritualistic undertaking. Nevertheless, strong commitment saw to it that they worked for months to get the *seshin* organised in the best way they thought possible. Frank was very proud of his work. In particular, he was responsible for setting up the *zendo* (meditation room). The room he had to work with was not ideal but through meticulous planning he had figured it out. Frank was more than satisfied with his work as he recalls, “I had done a really good job” (F8 – stress in original). Unfortunately, he was also strongly attached to it and what Susan McKinsey did when she arrived shocked him. Here is what happened in his words:

> And my teacher arrived at the centre and she was looking around and she came into the *zendo* and she looked around and she said, “OK, we won't do it like this.
We’ll take these people here and we’ll put them over there. And we’ll put those people over there. I want a row of cushion down there ... da, da, da, da ...” And for me this was devastating. I mean I’d spent months ... I was so attached to my work here. And I kept saying, “But ... but can't you see that if ... it works better if it’s like this.” And she just looked at me and said, “Frank, things don’t always have to be perfect. Things don’t always have to be perfect.” That’s all she said. And it went through me like an arrow because I had never before seen clearly how attached I was to an idea of perfection, to the idea that I could control things to create perfection. I was incredibly perfectionistic and incredibly attached to the product of my perfectionism. That one statement, “Frank, things don’t have to be perfect” turned my practice around because suddenly I realised that what practice was partly about for me was my attachment to control and to perfection. (F8)

This was an important moment for Frank. For the first time he saw clearly that he was a prisoner of his own making, the perfectionism that ruled his life. Perfectionism was something that had the potential to be destructive because “if we live our life from the idea that we have to be able to control things, we have to be in control, or if we live our life from the idea that I’m only worthwhile … if I can achieve perfection then we’re going to live a very unhappy life. We’re going to live a life that also creates difficulties for others” (F8). Fortunately, he also realised that he could address perfectionism through practice. Thus, from that day onward, one strand of practice has been “to work with that very deeply held view of myself and that very intense attachment to that view” (F8). That strand of practice still continues today over twenty years since that fateful moment, a moment that exposed in all its powers a major hindrance to Frank’s personal sustainability. Working with perfectionism for all those years has not eliminated it but it no longer dominates his life. In Frank’s own words, “this tendency can largely cease to be a problem or a ruling motivation” (F33). This means behaviour needs not be governed by or dependent on this character trait. Over time, the strength of Frank’s reaction to things that did not meet his expectations or standards has subsided (F33-34, F18). This has been the fruit of Zen; it has, by and large, mitigated the ill effects of perfectionism. The result can be seen in two main arenas of his life: the Zen group and the university.

Zen group

For much of my life I believed that if I could simply organise things better I could keep better control of them, that therefore I could be less threatened, and things would work better and I’d be happier. OK? Now, that is a very crude statement but someone who is attached to or invested in perfectionism or in control has this view that what life is about is arranging things externally so that I’m happier ... so that they reinforce my identity, my well-being, my feeling of being valued. (F11)
Frank understood the nature of perfectionism early on and realised that one of its traits is the desire for control. Control is targeted at the external environment in order to make one feel safe. This was a dangerous thing that could influence the interaction with other people. In particular, having received authorisation to teach independently from Susan, Frank had complete and autonomous control over his new Zen group (now in its sixth year of existence). Traditionally, Zen groups are run hierarchically and this would suit wholly his perfectionist tendency; it would be an ideal place for indulgence. Frank was not about to let that happen and instead chose a path that was much more conscious, one that took into account the dynamic relationships within the group. To articulate his stance Frank borrows a teaching from one of the founders of Zen Buddhism in America, Shunryu Suzuki:

... one of the things he said was if you want to control – he was talking about a cow – he says, “If you want to control a cow, give it a very big pasture.” “If you want to control a cow, give it a very big pasture.” Now you might think if you want to control a cow what you’ve got to do is confine it, right? Confine it. He said, “Give it a very big pasture.” Allow it to be a cow, to do what cows do. They wander. They graze. They meander. You know, they come and they go. That’s what true control is. That’s what true relationship is. (F11)

The idea of control is counterproductive to itself. Rather, what Frank is suggesting is that true control lies in giving space which, ironically, is no control at all. It is a paradox, beyond simplistic dichotomy. Giving space in the context of a Zen group means allowing students freedom to learn from their mistakes and carefully observing Frank’s own reactions:

... sometimes you might say, “They’re not doing this quite right. Why do they keep doing that? They keep getting that wrong. It’s a simple procedure. Why aren’t they ...?” Alright? I want to control that. What can I do to control that? OK? Or you can simply observe. You can simply observe and observe your own reactions. You can simply say, “OK, I’m just going to watch how this operates for these people, how they engage with that aspect of their practice. I’m going to watch my reactions to that, the fact that I’d like it to be a different way. I’m going to practice with that for a little while and then, coming out of that, I’m going to decide how best to handle the situation.” (F11 – stress in original)

Having taken into account his own reactions, Frank could then assess the best approach to help them as he elaborates:

First of all, is it important? Or is it not important? If it’s important to practice ... that people be aware of doing something in a particular way or be aware of the attitude they bring to something, then how can I best reintroduce that into practice. Is it that I need to give a talk about practice from that point of view? Is it that I need to demonstrate that in my own practice? In other words, not say anything but just rigorously demonstrate in the way that I do something. (F11)

This is a subtle approach requiring patience and dedication. For Frank, running the group is as much a practice of working with his perfectionism as it is the teaching of Zen. Through the understanding of his personality, he has not allowed the desire for control to prevent him from observing in details the
behaviour of his students. This facilitates unclouded judgement when it comes to deciding the most appropriate course of action. Thus, Frank has been able to foster a delicate and respectful relationship between himself and his students that is more conducive for spiritual development.\textsuperscript{13} His approach to the group is one that is focused on each student and on the student’s capacity for self-exploration. It is about giving them “a big expanse”, stepping back, taking time, minimising control and letting people learn from their own experience (F12).

\textit{Work at the university}

During one stage of his career at the university, he was in charge of the academic program. This was a huge responsibility and Frank took it seriously. Such position usually entails much stress but Frank’s approach made it worse – an incident illustrates the point:

There was quite a big meeting. There were maybe ten or fifteen people and we’re sitting round a table and the issue ... I can't remember what it was but it was quite a difficult issue ... and I could feel the way that I was becoming ‘Hhh!’ [indicating heat and stress]. And I realised that I was coming out of meetings like that feeling often that I had failed. (F12)

As he began to grapple with the situation – the regular feeling of disappointment and resignation - he realised what was happening. He had taken responsibility for all that was happening upon himself and understood that this was simply unsustainable:

... I was taking on myself \textit{all} the responsibility for the decisions that were being made. Sometime a decision was made by a large committee and I could see that it was not the right decision or it would not work properly or it could not be carried through or it would create difficulties. And I would kind of take all of that on my own shoulders as if I myself had failed. And I realised that I was trying to take on responsibility for everything. And I started to realise as I practiced with it that we can't do that. It’s destructive and it’s impossible. (F12 – stress in original)

Frank’s desire to take responsibility for others, indeed the whole institution, though irrational was merely an “expression of the desire to control everything” (F12). Since this was unattainable, feeling a failure was the only possible consequence. Again, perfectionism had reared its ugly head and again it was through the avenue of the desire to control. The demands of the job had baited his tendency of “getting things right” (F12). When Frank understood the situation, he immediately took it to practice. Though things continued to be tough during that period, he learnt a valuable lesson about himself and his role in the organisation:

... one of the things that I’ve learnt again is just to sometime allow things to take their course. To allow things to take their course ... If there’s something skilful that you can do to direct it in a positive way, do it. Often there isn’t. Often you have no control. You might have some influence but you have no control. And

\textsuperscript{13} This is especially important in the West, where Zen is not native and where a new Buddhist culture needs to emerge.
you simply allow things to unfold. When you can intervene, you intervene and you do what you can do. But there’s no point trying to feel like you are the institution which is what I did for a time. (F12)

The message from the passage is clear: let things be; let things unfold; affect change when you can and when it is wise to do so; do the best you can but don’t be attached to outcomes. Since most things are often beyond your control, you should work within the given limits but, at the same time, take the opportunity to learn about yourself. This increases your productivity as a human being and allows you to live a happier life. These lessons Frank learnt through practice and they have been invaluable to his work life.

Harnessing the Power of Perfectionism

Frank understood that although perfectionism was dangerous it could also be used productively. This is because the yearning for what is perfect, what is ideal and what is right contains an irrepressible energy. The trick is to use this energy while minimising what is undesirable:

The challenge is to harness the positive features of a desire to do things as well as possible, without negative effects on oneself or others. This is a practice issue and anyone practising effectively with this would monitor their tendencies to judge harshly, to speak punitively or to stress out. The alternatives to these are to pay attention to the reality of what is really happening (not the way it “should” be), to pay attention to the needs of others and act helpfully and supportively, and, over time, to learn to become comfortable with imperfection. (F30-31)

Frank stresses that harnessing the power of perfectionism is necessarily a “practice issue”, that is to say, something that requires dedicated practice. It involves monitoring negative tendencies such as harmful speech with the aim of minimising them. It also involves grounding action in the reality of the situation as it presents itself as oppose to acting on the basis of personal biases and desires. Hence, harnessing the power of perfectionism requires sustained effort, is not easy and has its pitfalls. It is only for those with an observant nature and an alert mind. Despite this, Frank has attempted to incorporate it into his everyday life and has met with some success. In particular, it has been a useful tool to enhance his productivity at work, and his well-being while doing it.

In conclusion, although ill health and associated physical suffering were a threat to Frank’s personal sustainability during childhood, it was perfectionism that became the chief thorn in his adult life. No one can know what would have happened if Frank had not come face to face with perfectionism all those years ago. There seems no doubt though that he would have had a harder time living with himself and with others. Strong traits such as perfectionism tend to reinforce themselves through spawning habits that become entrenched. These habits can cause havoc for the unaware. In particular, the desire to control, one facet of perfectionism, can be very destructive. History is littered with examples of those
whose desire for control exceeded the compassion in their hearts. Fortunately, Frank had Zen and through Zen practice he was able to harness perfectionism’s energy for good while disempowering its negative sides.

5.3.7 Quinn

For much of his childhood Quinn lived on a farm in rural Australia. As such he was close to nature, its beauty captivating his imagination (Q20). Quinn is of Irish descent and his family that includes a priest is devoutly Catholic. As a boy, he would attend Mass, take Holy Communion and hear monks chant in a chapel near his home (Q2). In his early teens, he would leave to attend a Catholic school in Sydney.

Impediments to Personal Sustainability

Unfortunately, Quinn’s religious upbringing also created a severe impediment to personal sustainability. This impediment he termed “negative, irrational self-view” and it plagued much of his early life (Q11). He attributes its cause to the imposition of dogmas during childhood and the resulting mental conditioning:

I was brought up in the Irish Catholic tradition and we were basically taught that we were flawed from the moment of birth, and the whole Catholic education which was very strict ... you were taught about hell, you were just made to feel that there was something wrong with you. (Q8)

That “something wrong” is having sin on your soul and he believes the idea is destructive because it starts a person’s life from a state of deficiency:

The biggest problem is this notion of being born with sin on your soul, and you know, Jesus Christ having to die on the cross to save you! ... from the word go, you’re taught that there’s something wrong with you ... (Q8)

And this is exactly what Quinn felt for much of his life, that there was something intrinsically wrong with him and there was nothing he could do. A major expression of negative self-view is “irrational guilt” (Q9, Q24), an inexplicable feeling of being wrong, being not good enough or being a failure (Q15). Irrational guilt has been a part of Quinn’s life for longer than he cares to remember but he has no doubt that it began to surface after several incidents as a child. He recounts one episode of being severely reprimanded while playing in the shower with his brother:

... my brother and I were showering after going to the beach. My uncle was a priest and he used to take us to the beach and then we’d go back to my auntie’s place. And we were showering and we were in there having a really good time, and he came in and started screaming at us: “You’re engaging in body worship!” And I remembered as a kid, for one week I was worried about that. You know, “What’s wrong with me?” – I didn’t realise what I was doing was wrong and I was really ... because I was a sincere Catholic. I spent a week thinking what had
I did wrong! I didn’t realise that that was wrong. And all we were, were kids having a warm shower, really enjoying it after we had been on the beach. (Q15)

Another was the teaching that masturbation would result in going to hell if you died the next day because it was a mortal sin. As a teenager, this instilled great fear in Quinn’s heart (Q15). Quinn believes that these experiences caused him to judge himself constantly and harshly, and the result was to see himself as a failure - of neither being able to remove the taint from his soul nor live up to the standard set by his faith. Predictably he found that he did not like himself much and at times the feeling would be quite strong emerging as self-hatred (Q10, Q12, Q28). An example of this is a dislike of his personal appearance:

... you look in the mirror and go, “Yuck!” - how ugly you are. You don’t go to the mirror and say, “May you be happy.” (Q10)

Unfortunately, these were issues so deep that he alone could not resolve. It was only until he started a journey of self-exploration with the help of Buddhism that he began to address them.

**Meeting Buddhism**

As a teenager in high school, Quinn was enthralled by a book on yoga written by a Jesuit priest. Its description of meditation as ‘higher states of consciousness’ made such an impact that Quinn believes it to be “the beginning of the end of Catholicism” for him (Q20). After graduating from university, he became disillusioned with his work and discovered that his education had not fulfilled his passion (Q1). So he began to read books on psychology, philosophy, Daoism and Buddhism. However, it was not until he made a trip to England and enrolled at the Ching Academy that he began Buddhist practice. At the Academy, he learnt about Buddhism with Master Ching, a Chinese Ch’an teacher, and found the experience enlightening:

... when I studied Buddhism under Master Ching, it just made so much sense - I couldn’t believe how clear it was. Like a lot of Westerners, I was very impressed with the notion of not having to believe in anything. You know, you try it out in the Buddhist tradition and if it works, it works. There’s no blind belief in dogma. That whole experience with that teacher was mind-blowing for me. I felt for the first time in my life, I just got very clear answers to many of my questions ... (Q2)

Quinn found the intellect of Master Ching fascinating as he recalls one of the sayings that engaged his mind:

He would say things like, “The reason your mind is full of thoughts is because you don’t think one thought through. You think a thought, and then you think a thought about it, and so you never complete the thought and that’s why your mind is full of thoughts. If you thought the thought, the thought would be thought and your mind would be empty.” (Q3)
Quinn explains that much of Ch'an concerns the form and formlessness and, in this example, it is about finding the space between two thoughts because that is your mind. However, he found Ch'an’s direct path into the human psyche as epitomised by the sayings ‘No dependence on scriptures’ and ‘Direct seeing into the mind’ too difficult. This was compounded by Master Ching’s aloofness, and, after persevering for four years, he turned to an organisation called Friends of Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) under the leadership an Englishman named Sangharakshita (Q3).

The approach of Sangharakshita at the FWBO was different in that he sought to address negative conditionings specifically associated with Western people. He believed that such conditionings made the individual dysfunctional and spiritual growth impossible until they are removed. Here Quinn explains:

So Sangharakshita’s approach is before you can grow spiritually, you’ve got to grow psychologically. You’ve got to make yourself a happy, sane, integrated self before you can go beyond the self. And so of the evidence is that the early forms of Buddhism that came into the West like Zen, if you like, forced into situations where they had experiences but they were not integrated enough psychologically to assimilate. So Sangharakshita’s approach ... like Zen’s approach is to shatter the ego ... our approach is, no, to build a very healthy, mature and integrated self – a true individual ... (Q10)

According to Quinn, Sangharakshita believed conditioning resulted in the tendency of Western people “to be over-developed intellectually and under-developed emotionally” (Q29, Q31). For the English, the imbalance is so strong that emotional repression – the inability to experience strong emotions – is a common problem. In this case, Sangharakshita encouraged them to experience emotions fully through such things as art and poetry (Q10). For others, this might be less of an issue although experiential practice is still important to maintain the balance between intellect and emotion. Experiential practice stops excessive analysis, a trait of the Western mind, and allows correct practice of mindfulness (Q5, Q6, Q4). This is because the correct practice of mindfulness is also about experiencing all the facets of oneself as opposed to alienated observation (Q4, Q6).

Impact of Buddhism

Although mindfulness is foundational to FWBO, many other practices are also used. For Quinn, four of these addressed his issues of guilt and self-dislike that prevented him from becoming a “happy, sane, integrated self” or, in other words, issues that were impediments to personal sustainability. The first was therapeutic blasphemy, an attempt to shake off the ‘irrational’ fear of God that was an undercurrent in his Westerner mind. Quinn recalls how therapeutic blasphemy intrigued him and also how difficult it was for him to accomplish even after having renounced Christianity many years ago:
Could I actually say, “Get stuff God!” or whatever? And one day I made myself say, “F*** the Virgin Mary!” and before I could say it I thought this, “Oh my god this ... hrr [frightened tone]” - may be the sky would fall down on me or something like that. But I made myself do it and that showed me. Even at that age - I would have been about thirty by then - that that level of irrationality can still be in you. Even though you’ve intellectually rejected Christianity and all of that, you’ve been conditioned since childhood in those beliefs and to actually swear at the Virgin Mary, you know, that would be considered a terrible crime by Christians. And this teaching by Sangharakshita is considered by some, even Western Buddhists, quite controversial ... But I think it was fantastic! The sense of relief that I felt when I could say that, “Yep” [clapped hands showing satisfaction]. (Q9 – stress in original)

On completing therapeutic blasphemy, it was as if Quinn was freed from the primeval fear that had fettered him. Now it was banished for good and freedom from this indoctrination tasted sweet. He would later explain that Christians have a much greater tendency for blasphemy because they have been coerced by fear of going to hell into doing things (Q15). Thus, therapeutic blasphemy, while seemingly melodramatic, is a way to help overthrow such deep legacy of conditioning.

The second practice that made an impact on Quinn was metta-bhavana or loving-kindness meditation. The purpose of this is to foster positive emotions (Q10). While many Westerners struggle with it especially the first stage when one feels loving-kindness for oneself Quinn seemed not to have any problems and felt warmth permeating within himself (Q9). However, he did notice a lot of “subconscious gossip” - negative thoughts and inclinations directed at himself - as he explains:

Yes, things like ... to even say things to yourself like, “I love you”, or just to say your own name with affection silently, that was difficult. Part of you is saying, “You're not suppose to do this. You’re not suppose to do that.” Or to say, “I can achieve anything I want to. I have enormous potential,” and then you would have another voice saying, “No, you haven’t. You’re a failure.” (Q9)

So Quinn soon discovered that his relationship with himself was not ideal; it was at best ambivalent and at worse antagonistic. One cause of this he believes stems from the Christian notion of charity and selflessness (Q12). The Western psyche is steeped in the belief that to do God’s work a person must perform acts of service for others. According to Quinn, because such a strong emphasis is placed on sacrifice, the self is often marginalised. The propensity is then to reach out to others while being terminally confused about how to deal with oneself. Therefore showing affection for oneself becomes difficult because it is taken to mean selfishness. This is exacerbated by a “strict code of commandments” that is forced upon rather than accepted by Christians (Q15).

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14 Metta-bhavana consists of five stages: 1) cultivating metta for yourself, 2) for a friend, 3) a neutral person, 4) a difficult person or enemy, and finally 5) all sentient beings.
To tackle his troublesome view of self and its manifestation of subconscious gossip, Quinn practiced self-love as advocated by Sangharakshita. Sangharakshita had understood intimately the nature of Christian conditioning and propounded that self-love be embraced fully and passionate, that is to say, the generated feelings of self-love “mustn’t be luke warm or tepid. They must be actually quite hot, even spicy” (Q12). Only by doing so can one create enough power to confront the Western mind at a deeper level of consciousness.

The practice of self-love as described was (and still is to a certain extent) not easy for Quinn (Q12). However, it was effective in alleviating the harsh view of self, as he describes:

The *metta bhavana* very much helped [in] dealing with this. It helped me develop a much softer, patient and more affectionate relationship with myself. Again, I think that, like a lot of Western people, I had a rather hard, judgemental, ‘external’, intellectual way of relating to myself. Now I feel it is more caring, ‘internal’, softer, less judgemental and more relaxed, forgiving and tolerant. All together a much more positive way of relating to myself. I think this is one of the most profound changes that Buddhism and practices like the *metta bhavana* have worked on me. (Q30-Q31)

The change in Quinn seems to be from one of strong rationalism as ingrained by the Enlightenment process to one that is more based on natural affection for life. Altogether it seems a healthier relationship with self and a prerequisite for higher levels of practice.

Thirdly, Buddhism provided Quinn with antidotes to deal with mental hindrances – any negative feelings that form an obstacle to practice or clarity of mind.¹⁵ The antidotes consists of four ‘tactical’ options, namely:

1) *considering the consequences of staying in that state*
2) *cultivating the opposite*
3) *cultivating with a sky-like mind*
4) *suppression¹⁶* (Q32, Q41-42)

In fact, *metta bhavana* can be considered a specific meditation technique within the overall scheme of antidotes (Q32). Hence, if the feeling of self-hatred arose this would be considered ill-will, the second hindrance. Quinn would then apply one of the antidotes to prevent it from causing harm. The antidote of choice for self-hatred would usually be *metta bhavana* (Q31) since it is a form of meditation and,

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¹⁵ Traditionally, there are five hindrances: 1) sensual desire, 2) ill-will, 3) sloth and torpor, 4) restlessness, worry or remorse, and 5) doubt.

¹⁶ Here Quinn explains about suppression: “This is different from repression, which is unconsciously pushing something down into our unconscious. This antidote [suppression] is a last resort. We are convinced of the pointlessness of playing host to the hindrance and we simply say ‘no’ and push it aside” (Q42).
thus, provides concentrated power. Any of the antidotes could be used individually or in combination with other antidotes. However, Quinn understands that the realisation that one is dwelling in self-hatred in the first place and that this is a hindrance are essential starting points before applying the antidotes. To do so requires self-awareness (mindfulness), a foundational practice of FWBO and something that Quinn practices regularly (Q5, Q28, Q32).

Lastly, the practice of *sila* (Buddhist ethics) is a positive contributor to Quinn overall mental well-being. As opposed to Christian commandments, *sila* is a voluntary code of conduct that fosters peaceful relationship with oneself and others. Hence, it is a guideline for skilful action that provides instant benefits for the practitioner. Quinn takes the five precepts everyday as required by FWBO and attempts to uphold them as much as possible (Q21). This has resulted in more happiness and a positive frame of mind (Q32). Naturally, seeing the benefits, he feels a greater desire to uphold the precepts even more strictly.

**Happier and Positive Self**

The overall impact of Buddhism on Quinn’s personal sustainability is a kinder sense of self and greater balance between emotions and reason. A kinder sense of self means proper self-esteem without being egotistical. Emotion/reason balance stops excessive intellectualisation while at the same time managing emotions more effectively (Q29, Q30). With the change, Quinn has discovered that he is able to transform negative energy such as anger, unhappiness and self-hatred into positive energy as illustrated in this example:

... once when I was very depressed after breaking off with a girlfriend. I was feeling very unhappy so I just allowed myself to experience that until I got to the point where it was raw energy. Then I turned that energy using imagery and so on, into *metta* for myself. And it worked! I went from being quite depressed – very depressed actually – to 45 minutes later feeling loving-kindness and compassion for myself. (Q5-Q6)

Clearly, he was able to stop wallowing in depression and turn it into inner peace. This is because depression or anger is energy. Energy is energy. If one can reach it in its rawest form through experiencing it, one can transform it into more useful emotions provided one is skilful enough (Q28). Armed with this knowledge, Quinn has been able to “connect with and build up a reservoir of positive emotion” that has strengthened his mental resilience (Q31).

Finally, Buddhist practice has allowed Quinn to get in touch with his ‘real’ self. He discovered that, as he states, “... underneath the Catholic conditioning there’s a very happy, and there always was, boy” (Q13). So this happiness existed from the beginning when he was a child having those spiritual
The Participants – Addressing Personal (Un)Sustainability

experiences and living in nature. This happiness was most noticeable when Quinn attended meditation retreats and practiced continuously.

As he approaches sixty, Quinn has discarded much of the Catholic conditioning that has marred his life especially during the earlier years. His relationship with other people has improved because “what you’re feeling about yourself you inevitably project outwardly” (Q12), and metta bhavana has also helped (Q30). Rather than become bitter, haunted by guilt and regret with the passing of years, his life has become more joyous yet in harmony with others - surely the ultimate aim of personal sustainability. Now with over thirty years of Buddhist practice, Quinn sums up his present situation:

I find now I can access that positive feeling and self-metta more or less at will. I also dwell more on positive emotions when they arise ... I feel more at ease with myself these days than I can remember at any past stage in my life. (Q31)

Being at ease with himself is no small feat especially for one who had such a difficult upbringing. Buddhism has certainly been empowering.

5.3.8 Kacy

Unlike Quinn’s, Kacy’s religious upbringing was more moderate. This was because, although she had a typical exposure to Christianity, her father encouraged her to be “a questioning atheist” (K8). That meant trying to explore teachings, or anything else for that matter, in the most reasonable, logical way (K8, K29). However, while she escaped the worse aspects of conditioning, she has suffered several traumatic incidents in her life. Two of these are described here because they made her life miserable – barriers to personal sustainability – together with the impact of Buddhism.

Impediment to Personal Sustainability: Assault

The first impediment to Kacy’s personal sustainability was the trauma she suffered when she was physically and sexually assaulted in her early twenties (K6). That event devastated her, as did the judicial process that made her “minced meat” (K7). She began to question why things happened and deeper notions of justice. She met other women who had suffered similar fate, learnt about human resilience and shared their pain. Nevertheless, many questions on how the world worked remained unanswered and her mind continued “spinning” disturbed by an event that perhaps should never have happened (K6).

Meeting Buddhism

Kacy first encountered Buddhism when she was asked to work on a committee organising the Dalai Lama’s visit to Worcester (K1). The committee needed her communications expertise and she accepted
the invitation partly because of her positive impression of the Dalai Lama as a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Kacy was not a Buddhist, yet for two years she had to work along side committed Buddhists. Their attitudes and outlook on life would transform her world including the view of herself as a rape victim.

**Impact of Buddhism**

One of the committee members was an Australian Tibetan monk named Dawa. Dawa had been a physiotherapist before becoming a monk and was now training in palliative care to help the elderly, the sick and the dying (K14). He had taken an interest in near-death experiences and was intrigued by a similar experience Kacy had undergone during the assault. So during a lunch she began to tell him her story but used the point of view of herself as a victim – how people and events had treated her badly. What happened next was totally unexpected: Dawa burst out laughing! She was taken aback confused. “Why? What’s so funny?” she thought, and she was even more puzzled as his laughter seemed to flow out of happiness (K14). He then began to explain what he saw from a Buddhist perspective. She recalls:

... he said, “Do you realise how fortunate you are?” And I said, “No!” and I actually thought, “Poor me,” you know. And he said, “1. This happened to you; bad karma ripening; finished now ... 2. You survived. You’ve still got your precious human rebirth. Pretty good! 3. More than that, you don’t know it, but you’ve met the dharma.” He said, “You’re the luckiest person on the earth!” (K14)

Her first reaction was incredulity wanting none of it. She explains that at the time she was still clinging steadfastly to an old idea of self: “I still wanted to be ‘me the victim’ who survived this, because it was a bit of my identity” (K14). She wanted to feel sorry for herself and wanted others to acknowledge it with words such as “Poor you!” or “How terrible for you” (K14). In other words, the hurt from the original wound had gone but the scar it left was self-pity and unknowingly she had cherished it. Hence, hearing Dawa explain a totally different perspective was like a slap in the face. Fortunately, she took it with grace at least on the exterior such was his sincerity. And it made a lot of sense on further reflection: Dawa was telling her why she should be happy right at that moment and why to forget the past. Firstly, the terrible things in her life had happened and finished. This was the fruit of karma and she should be grateful that they are over. There was no need or use in dwelling in them. Secondly, that karmic fruit had left her intact, still alive and well. The consequences were harsh but she had coped. The precious gift of human rebirth – precious because of the human potential for greatness of Buddhahood – remains. Lastly, she had met the dharma by being with Buddhists and was about to meet the Dalai Lama. From his point of view, this was a fortuitous moment full of opportunities ahead. Rather than pessimism, her situation was a cause for celebration.
Hearing Dawa at first dumbfounded Kacy, but it was a powerful moment in her life that triggered a re-orientation of worldviews. She had been shown a door to happiness that was ironically a culmination of her troubled past. The assault that she had once thought to be a cruel act of fate was, in fact, an opportunity. Karma had played itself out and now was the time to build a new life filled with optimism. Fortunately, she would soon accept the challenge but that moment, when Buddhism introduced itself in the most personal way, certainly made an lasting impression. Her approach to life would never be the same again.

**Impediment to Personal Sustainability: Menopause**

A second major impediment to personal sustainability occurred during Kacy’s menopause. During that time Kacy suffered severe anxiety attacks that verged on mental illness, the result of hormonal imbalances (K9). At times it was so serious that she had to take antidepressants as well as HRT (an oestrogen supplement). The anxiety manifested itself as out of control thoughts that spun out in every direction and cycled viciously:

> Thoughts were just going ‘urrrr urrrr urrrr’ looping around and stuff like that. (K10)

And they would also dip into the dark side that caused unfathomable fear:

> ... it was like you’d just spin off into this mini hell realm, from what the Tibetan calls it, in terms of being fearful, yet there was nothing to be afraid of. When you went and had a look at the fear to see what it was that you were afraid of, there was nothing there. (K9)

Kacy felt like she was going crazy and, needless to say, found the ordeal tormenting. Other than medication, Buddhism was the only thing that helped her get through.

**Impact of Buddhism**

Kacy had adopted Buddhism as her faith after the Dalai Lama’s tour and had been practicing Tibetan Buddhism for several years before the onset of menopause. She had learnt several techniques that proved effective when she needed it most. Firstly, the technique of mindfulness allowed her to distance herself just enough from the thoughts:

> Dharma would really help me to make a little, little gap there, between me and the thought. So I could say, “Feeling crazy,” or “Feeling frightened,” and I would be able to sit with it a bit instead of going ‘uh... uh... .uh’ [tone and body language signifying going delirious]. (K10)

She was thus able to see the thoughts as thoughts, the agitation as agitation and fear as fear – though it seemed a monumental effort even to do this for a short while such was her condition. However, that was enough to establish a degree of calmness that prevented total immersion in those ravaging thoughts. As she concludes, “… the dharma has helped me an awful lot in just being able to separate
myself from, you know, ‘I am not my thoughts.’ Thoughts are just thoughts: they come and they go” (K9). It was through this perspective borne out of persistency in being mindful that helped her get through.

Secondly, Kacy recited mantras to alleviate her suffering. One mantra she found useful during menopause was the mantra for Tara, ‘Om tare tuttare ture svaha’ (K5). This mantra is part of Tibetan tantric practice which she was beginning to be exposed to. The words themselves are ancient and harmonic. Thus, on one level, focusing on them creates concentration that can soothe the bewildered soul. On another level, Tara is a female buddha (Figure 5.4) that represents compassion in action and is sometime portrayed leaping to help people in need.

![Figure 5.4: White Tara (retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org)](image)

Recitation of the mantra draws on imagery to create harmony, as Kacy explains:

> When you say the mantra for Tara ... you’re actually trying to evoke compassion in action usually for yourself if you are a bit frightened or stuff like that, and it’s very calming because you are at the same time imagining all the compassionate beings in the universe helping you, and that you can become one of them and help others. (K5)

The idea is to harness the power of all buddhas and bodhisattvas in the universe. This provides inner strength and can then be projected onto others, the latter providing the added benefit of shifting attention away from the frightened self. Reciting the mantra also brings forward the compassionate virtue that all human beings possess. As Kacy states, “Tara is not somebody else; Tara is an aspect of ourselves” (K5).

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17 This mantra is a play on Tara’s name representing the three stages of salvation.
Lastly, Kacy also found succour in Tonglen meditation. Tonglen is about taking on the suffering of other people and then sending something out that would alleviate their plight. It can be done during times of stress, as Kacy explains:

... if you’re flipping out because you’re frightened, you think, “OK, lots of people in the world are doing this and far worse than me, people who have no control over their fear. They’re either being attacked or murdered or bombed or tortured or whatever. So what I can do is try to take on some of their pain for them.” So you imagine breathing in their fear and you imagine breathing it in like really thick, black smoke, and you breathe it down into your heart, and you extinguish it. And then you breathe out as white light to them, or blue water or whatever. (K13)

Kacy explains that though this may sound counterintuitive – people usually want to avoid pain – Tonglen is very powerful because it changes your attitude toward yourself and others. Rather than being afraid of pain, you take it on with openness and learn to sit with it. One such pain was the uncontrollable fear Kacy experienced during menopause. Tonglen and other practices taught her to face this fear. When asked how confronting fear was like, Kacy replied:

Absolutely terrifying! But after a little while you just get a little bit of a gap, a little one ... it doesn’t go away but it means that you’re not so controlled by it. Sort of like it sits there, like you know when you have stomach ache. And you can think about it, “Ah my stomach is hurting,” but it’s just part of me ... [So] you can sit with the fear and it’s there, but it’s not so much ripping your heart. (K13)

In other words, it is about learning to live with fear and other anxieties without being consumed by it. Tonglen also reduces selfishness and self-absorption through compassionate feelings. As Kacy sums up, “You stop doing the ‘poor me’ thing and think about other people” (K13). Thus, Tonglen helped ameliorate the psychological drama that drove Kacy into a terrible state during menopause.

**Conclusion**

These two examples illustrate the importance of Buddhism to Kacy’s well-being during incidents that threatened her life physically and mentally. In the first case, Buddhism enabled her to put the past behind with a new way of thinking. In the second, Buddhism helped her survive a physical condition that had extensive psychological ramifications.

Overall, Tibetan Buddhism has provided Kacy with an arsenal of tools, techniques and ways of thinking that she uses not only in crises but also in everyday living. The mindfulness that was effective during menopause is also effective in daily life, for example in dealing with a difficult person (K22). Tonglen can be done any time, for example when seeing a mother troubled by her crying children (K35). Loving-kindness meditation, another favourite technique, is appropriate for instilling a compassionate heart and has been used successfully to improve her relationship with one of her sisters.
5.3.9 Rae

Rae grew up in a typical middle-class family in Bangkok (R21). He had an ordinary childhood with two siblings. His parents were cultural Buddhists meaning that they attended religious ceremonies and merit-makings as was the norm but did not engage in dharma practice. However, Rae had something that was neither inherited nor acquired: an enquiring yet disciplined nature and an innate sense of ethics that would stand him in good stead later on in life (R21). Unlike other participants, Rae’s journey to overcome impediments to personal sustainability was not about finding Buddhism. Rather, it was about finding the right form of Buddhism for him.

Suffering and Broken Heart

During the fourth year of his undergraduate studies Rae began to understand the meaning of suffering. His girlfriend left him and he was left with a broken heart. The suffering was great, as he describes:

I felt terrible. I didn’t want to see anyone. I didn’t want to eat or sleep. I was devastated and I felt I had lost everything. Life held no meaning for me … I was sick of it. (R1)

However, even without the shock of being jilted, Rae always felt that he was suffering during those years as a student, but he had no idea why this was the case or what to do about it.

Preliminary Glimpse of Dharma

Rae was lost, troubled by the pains of youth. It was during that time that he discovered a book by the Thai philosopher monk, Buddhadasa. He recounts the event that started his journey in Buddhism:

The title of the book was called ‘Why are we born?’ So that caught my attention and I repeated the title to myself in my mind, “Why are we born?” and began to read it. Buddhadasa asked whether the only purpose of being born was to eat, procreate and build reputation. In fact, human beings deserve something that is better than these, and that’s living without suffering. According to Buddhism, this is the highest achievement possible for human beings: living without suffering. When I read that book … I felt as if there was a way out. From then on I began to take an interest in Buddhism … (R9)

Suffering was something that drew him to Buddhism but it would not be the last time. After Rae graduated, he began to explore the world of commerce and university life and he would find that suffering was an inescapable fact of life. For now though, at least hope was in the air. He began to read more starting with the books at his parents’ home. He tried meditation on his own. Then, out of
misunderstanding, he joined a group that was preoccupied with spirits and the supernatural (R1-R2). After many years, common sense prevailed as he started to observe that the behaviour of the members were distasteful and incongruous with dharma. He got out quickly.

**Practicing Meditation**

After finishing his Bachelor degree, he continued with postgraduate studies. On recommendation of a professor, he began to learn meditation from a monk who was teaching nearby (R2). Rae became dedicated attending teachings regularly and meditating daily. Meditation soon became a passion – something too important to be missed even for a single day (R3). The strange thing was, Rae was a terrible meditator. In fact, he could not do it at all! Rae had been taught concentrative meditation, known as *samatha*, that focused the mind on a mantra, a movement or an object. However, his mind was too restless. The only thing he had was sheer determination - to attempt every technique that was available:

> I tried every method. I tried every one of them. This is because I couldn’t do any of them so I had to try. I couldn’t concentrate on the air movement. I attempted to concentrate on objects using foam cut out into a circle but couldn’t do that. My mind wasn’t still; it wasn’t at peace at all. So I tried every technique … anything that came across I tried them all, but my mind would not stay focused. There was only a state of ceaseless wandering mind or I would fall asleep. (R3)

Yet for over ten years Rae continued trying as hard as he could and always failing. He could not do it yet he could not stop trying. Despite the lack of success in dharma practice, he learnt basic principles of Buddhism such as forgiveness, karma and positive thinking about the world. As he puts it, “It was about adjusting my viewpoint so that it was heading toward right understanding on many things” (R3). However, it would not be sufficient to relieve the suffering he had experienced.

**Suffering and Business**

During the same time he started meditating he invested in a business with a friend. However, he quickly discovered that doing business was pure suffering: the problems and the pressure were never far away. Despite the income, the stress made him realise that it was definitely not the way to happiness:

> When I invested in a business, I did not gain any happiness from that. I was always thinking about it. Like if we got an order, I’d be constantly worrying about it, I’d have to work hard and I’d have to deliver it on time … those sorts of things. I didn’t see how it made me happy! So I started seeing that there was no happiness there. (R11)

He realised that business was one constant struggle and nothing struggled more than the mind. Business truly conveyed the meaning of mental suffering as he muses:
behind it all, the mind is very stressed. Your mind and your heart are not at ease at all. Finding a moment of peace is very difficult to find unless you go and meditate or something like that. (R12)

Happiness in monetary terms is to miss the point. Rae argues that, since the mind is always unsettled, whatever pleasure that was derived from the use of money earned is not worth it. To make matters worse, Rae discovered that the things money afforded – shopping and going out with friends – gave him “no true happiness in the heart” (R11). Eventually a quarrel broke out between Rae and his partner and after two years they ended the venture. From that day on, Rae vowed never to engage in any form of business.

Suffering and Institutional Activism

When Rae landed tenure at the university, he was determined to right the problems he had encountered as a student (R13). Reform often required institutional change that, by their very nature, took time, were difficult to achieve and were not always possible. Rae fought hard. He was not someone to take things lightly. He had ‘the answers’ and he was going to get his way. The consequence of this attitude was clashes with management (R14) and his confrontational style did not endear him to co-workers (R21).

As he reflects, the path he took, though for the common good, had many pitfalls:

When you think about making the world a better place, or to make society better, you have to fight with other people because there’s no easy way that you can just waft along. The laws or rules in place that are wrong or the organisation culture that’s inappropriate that you’re trying to change ... these things you have to come up against people on many levels. (R14)

He had known this all along but he was just bullish. The consequence was that he suffered for it. Instigating change and trying to get his way even when it was not his responsibility was a tiring and unhappy affair. Nevertheless, perhaps out of habit, he persisted. Suffering was there but his understanding at the time was too crude to offer a better way.

Doo Chit

After the death of his meditation teacher, Rae discovered a website that contained articles by Asoke (R5). Asoke taught practice as almost casual observation of the mind that was the opposite of what Rae had been doing. This intrigued him and he decided to contact Asoke. By this time, Rae was practicing through fixation although he also spent considerable time analysing dharma concepts believing this to be vipassana. Fixation had caused him to feel heavy all over the body wherever he went. When Rae received his first advice from Asoke through e-mail, he was told that he had been practicing incorrectly. On hearing this, he abandoned fixation and very soon the heaviness subsided. Unfortunately, the reprieve did not last long and he went back to his original state of feeling heavy. He began to despair
and sought a personal meeting with Asoke. They met in 2000 and began a relationship that would last to this day.

The practice Asoke taught Rae is called *doo chit*, literary translated as ‘observing mind’ (R6). The idea is to simply observe whatever the mind does. All that was needed was an awareness of self to stop one from getting lost in thoughts or external stimuli (R10). Then one could observe - passively. Unfortunately, passivity was something alien to Rae’s idea of practice because he had always understood practice as *doing, engaging* and *coercing*. The idea of purely observing was something he found incomprehensible. He recalls the first meeting with Asoke who explained to him that practice should be completely natural:

So I met him [Asoke] at Jusco department store. He’d already arrived and was having dinner. And I was just walking as normal without doing anything ... wasn’t thinking about practice, nothing ... just walking normally. I walked to him and when I arrived he nodded and said, “Now you know what it’s like to have awareness.” I was puzzled, “Oh is it like this? Wasn’t doing anything.” It was the reverse of everything I’d known. Total reverse. Before I felt that I had to do this and that, coerce the mind to do things, learn this and that, but it wasn’t any of those. But when I just let it be, it was the right state of mind … (R6)

There, Rae began to understand that Buddhist practice according to Asoke was the practice of pure observation. Nothing more, nothing less. Asoke seemed to have the ability to gauge Rae’s state of mind and was telling him when he had awareness. Understanding what being aware was became vital since it was the prerequisite for observation. Hence, Rae spent months understanding this particular state of mind in subsequent meetings with Asoke and learning to differentiate between this and the mind that was lost in daydreams or analysis. As Rae became proficient, his observation sharpened. During this period, he met Asoke once or twice a month to assess progress. Asoke is now a monk but Rae continues his practice from waking up until going to sleep – any time there’s a moment spare is not wasted (R9, R10). Rae’s approach is relaxed and it suits his lifestyle as a layperson.

**Impact of Doo Chit**

The impact of *doo chit* on Rae’s life has been astonishing. It has virtually eliminated all forms of sufferings an average person might experience from Rae’s life (R13, R17). Simply put, the stresses and strains of daily life have all but vanished. This is how he explains what has happened after five years of practice:

Like suffering in work, I don’t suffer anymore. Suffering about people around me, I don’t suffer from that either. I have a child but I don’t suffer. For some people they suffer because of having a child, for example, how to get the child into school, education planning, finding the best school and so on. For me, I’m

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18 *Doo chit* is the teaching of the monk, Luang Pu Dune Atulo, a disciple of revered monk Luang Pu Mun.
not too bothered. If I have money, then I’ll send [him to private school] but if not my child will go to government school. So there’s been quite a change concerning suffering because of situations, circumstances or things that are worldly. They have virtually ceased to be a problem. (R13)

So for Rae, unlike other people, the three major arenas that emanate mental suffering - work, family and friends – no longer do so. For example, in work the bullishness so prominent in his early years has gone. It has been replaced by inner peace and equanimity (R13). Rae has realised that he can only do so much, his duty being limited in scope. Thus, the best option is to perform that duty as best as possible and then put the mind to rest knowing that is all he can do. This is how he describes the change in attitude:

Before I pushed hard to get things done. But now I don’t do this sort of thing ... anything to do with change and so on. If I’m in a position to give opinion, then I will do so. I speak a lot during meetings. I tell them that this is how things should be done and how that should be done ... many things. But I don’t have the responsibility to do them. My duty is give opinion on what should be done and how. Then it is up to the people responsible to do what they think is appropriate. It’s up to their judgement. My duty finishes when I give them information and opinion. However, if I have the responsibility to do them then I do it. I carry out my duty. (R14-R15)

For Rae the meaning of boundary of responsibility seems clearer than ever. Fighting for change in every jurisdiction not only seems an exercise in futility but also rocks the mind. As he adds, summing up the sensibility of the new approach: “In the end, if I can't do anything then I must let go, and wait if there’s an opportunity to do something. If there’s an opportunity, then I’ll do it but if there’s not then that’s too bad” (R15).

The practice of doo chit has been greatly responsible for the change of mindset. In particular, it has given Rae a detailed understanding of himself which he can extrapolate to others. In other words, Rae’s observation of his own mind has given him an understanding of how other people’s mind works:

... a major contributor has been the fact that I’ve been observing my mind (doo chit) and therefore I understand the thinking of others and their feelings. I understand that everyone is under the spell of defilements (kilesi) and desire (tanha). Everyone has their own opinion (thithi) and ego. It’s very hard to change somebody. Even trying to change yourself is difficult enough, because the mind tends to want to cling on to self-opinion (thithi) all the time. (R15-R16)

Rae is able to observe the defilements and desire in his own mind and, thus, succinctly understand the process in others. He realises that in the past his ego and opinionated nature was as strong as his co-workers. Back then he was no better, even though he considered himself fighting for the common good. He realises that changing himself is hard enough let alone changing others. Rae also has begun to grasp the human nature of his co-workers, that they are ordinary people who probably want comfort in their job and may not want to work hard (R22). These two factors, understanding of the mind process and identification with human nature, have allowed him to come to terms with his position as a lecturer in a
large university with limited powers. They have allowed him to work in greater harmony with himself and others.

The second example concerns his family. Recently, his son was sick and had to be hospitalised (R17). In most cases of this kind, the parents would feel anxiety, a form of suffering. However, Rae felt nothing. He felt no worries, not even agitation. As he puts it matter-of-factly, “Whatever happens happens” (R17). When further questioned, Rae explains that he did not even need to observe the mind because nothing came up. This seems to signify a radical change in the nature of his mind but it is not possible to explain what has occurred – just the fact that in certain circumstances suffering has completely ceased; the mind has adjusted naturally. A more theoretical explanation is based on Rae’s unconditioned acceptance, or to be precise, his mind’s unconditioned acceptance, of the law of karma. Karma states that for every cause there is an unavoidable effect. Thus, his son’s illness or even possible death is result of something done previously whether known or not. As Rae speaks, there is a sense of certainty, an assuredness of the truth of his position:

... if you look at it from the perspective of karma, then you understand that the reason he was ill was because of karma he created which inevitably has consequence. Cannot avoid it or escape from it. How badly he suffers is dependent on the seriousness of the karma he perpetrated. And if he was to die, then it would be because of the karma he created, that causes him to fall ill and have to die. This is a fact of karma. Therefore if you understand the principle of karma then you can let go of things, of worries. So you remain unperturbed and have equanimity if things happen to relatives and family – the mind will remain calm. There will be no commotion, sorrow, worries or any of these things. (R18)

However, this understanding of karma is borne out of practice rather than from deduction (R18-R19). During his early days practicing Buddhism, he had read much but all that did was give him, at best, a superficial understanding, at worse, confusion. Rather, this was the result of doo chit. As he surmises, nothing stands in the way of the acceptance of life according to Buddhism: “I accept the reality: this is birth, old age and death and these are ordinary” (R17).

**Conclusion**

Rae came to Buddhism because of suffering. It was a broken heart that first opened his eyes to its meaning. It was business that taught him about the anxieties of making money. And it was organisational politics that made him realise that suffering laid at every corner of the struggle for change. The practice of doo chit - nonchalant mind observation in daily life - changed all of that. It has virtually eradicated all mundane suffering from Rae’s life: no more anger, depression, disappointment, sadness or ill at ease in most of life’s situations. At worse, only a minor perturbation or feeling invades his mind and this is quickly snuffed out by observation (R17). This leaves him with equanimity to
conduct his affairs and a deep understanding of reality according to Buddhism. Thus, Rae dispenses his duty at work based on reason, maturity and a dose of compassion rather than passion. His family life is staid and decidedly grounded in acceptance rather than ambition. He adheres to the five precepts strictly but easily because they have become second nature (R19, R20). In his spare time, he lives quietly without much socialising (R22). His friends are dharma friends. They help him write books on doo chit for free distribution. He plans to retire early on a modest government pension perhaps supplemented by a simple form of livelihood, but he seems unconcerned whether this can be achieved or not (R24, R25). The freedom from suffering – unimaginable seven years ago - has strengthened his commitment to doo chit to the point that he can accept anything. Practice will always continue. In fact, it is the only thing he would rather do. This is because he knows that it is all in the mind; his existence seems almost on a different dimension.

5.4 Conclusion to Chapter 5

This chapter has presented the personal sustainability stories of the nine participants. The key information in each story is summarised in Table 5.2. Each story is a unique life experience from an individual who has sought Buddhism to overcome impediments to personal sustainability in his or her life. The participants have markedly different personalities and come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. This makes generalisation difficult. However, one trait they share without exception is a deeply questioning attitude to life. For some, such as Uthai and Zara, this questioning attitude resulted in finding life unsatisfactory even though they were born or found themselves in privileged circumstances. For others, such as Isaac and Abby, this questioning attitude turned into a search for meaning to guide the conduct of their lives. Yet for others - Mia, Frank, Kacy and Rae - this questioning attitude drove them to seek ways of alleviating suffering. Thus, this questioning attitude provided the energy and willingness for the participants to explore new spiritual avenues that were often beyond the mainstay of their culture.

For many participants finding Buddhism was a lengthy journey that often took many years. Most surprisingly, it was the Thai participants that had the most difficulties. Both Thai participants, Uthai and Rae, were born into the culture of Buddhism but the essence of Buddhism – the dharma and practice – was missing. Their search was a process of trial and error that often involved great effort and tribulation. Uthai and Rae had to experience what was ineffective before they could find and comprehend the right form of practice most suited to them. In contrast, the Australian participants, while needing time to abandon Christianity (mostly during childhood), settled into their newfound faith quickly and without much problem. In fact, the sense of “coming home” as articulated by Zara, Frank
### Table 5.2: Summary information on personal sustainability of the nine participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Personal Sustainability Issues</th>
<th>Meeting Buddhism &amp; adopted lineage</th>
<th>Impact of Buddhist Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Australian • Strict conservative Catholic upbringing • Severe abuses</td>
<td>Suffering: • Virulent anger • Self-hatred • Psychological damage from abuses</td>
<td>• Witnessing Tibetan lamas in Australia • Travelling in India &amp; Tibet • Tibetan Buddhism</td>
<td>• Reduced frequency and intensity of anger • Better understanding of people • Improved relationship with son &amp; relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>Australian • Prosperous middle class • Liberal parents • Happy childhood</td>
<td>Life as unsatisfactory: • Loss of spirituality • Lack of meaning in life • Drugs &amp; alcohol</td>
<td>In India at retreat • Goenka vipassana • Burmese Theravada Buddhism</td>
<td>Found meaning, purpose &amp; community • Equanimity in life • Happiness without addictions or materialism • Buddhist philosophical view of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Australian • Poor rural background • ‘Peasant class’ • Independent childhood</td>
<td>Life as unsatisfactory: • Lack of community • Lack of friendship • Sought spiritual home</td>
<td>In Sydney &amp; Thailand • Forest Tradition • Thai Theravada Buddhism</td>
<td>Gave concept of community • Community-building as purpose • Provided cosmology • Personal spiritual growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Australian • Moderate affluent background • Presbyterian boarding school • ‘Normal’ childhood</td>
<td>Life as unsatisfactory: • Spiritual void • Yearning for meaningful life • Seeking to integrate spirituality and passion for justice</td>
<td>In India at retreat • Goenka vipassana &amp; others traditions • Joanna Macy’s practices</td>
<td>Change of lifestyle to simplicity, community-building, practice &amp; ethics • Clarity and equanimity • Unified spiritual practice with activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uthai</td>
<td>Thai • Wealthy family in privileged class • Elite education • Lack of freedom in childhood</td>
<td>Life as unsatisfactory: • True happiness missing</td>
<td>Meeting meditation teacher during monkhood • Worked with several teachers in Forest Tradition &amp; vipassana practice</td>
<td>Experienced happiness through bhavana • Discovered life (dhammachart) as dualistic pairs • Mindfulness at every moment - the key to happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Australian • Middle class, non-observant Christian family • Lutheran school • Warm family</td>
<td>Suffering: • Existential fear • Perfectionism - desire to control the environment • Poor health as a child</td>
<td>Reading of Zen book in music teacher’s room • Learned Zen in USA • His formal Zen teacher, Susan McKinsey</td>
<td>Perfectionism ceases to dominate life &amp; action • Accepting physical suffering - not obsessing over it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and Abby (Z7, F1, A8) could be used to describe how Australian participants felt on encountering Buddhism.

For the Australians, Buddhist beliefs especially its lack of dogma and emphasis on experiential practice, resonated deeply as soon as they ‘discovered’ them. This ‘faith’ was reinforced when positive results on personal sustainability became obvious. Thus, the idea of ‘faith’ became different from that found in other religions because, in Buddhism, it is based on commitment, trust and allegiance to what works rather than to a divinity. ‘Faith’ in Buddhism is about pragmatism rather than ideology. In fact, pragmatism could be considered one of the other hallmarks displayed by the participants – a willingness to embrace new ways without remaining attached to the old if desired outcomes were not achieved.

The initial impact of Buddhism on the participants (with the exception of Rae) was an experience of happiness. For Mia and Isaac, it was happiness in finding a community and culture that made more sense than what they had seen previously. For Zara and Abby, it was a sense of equanimity, peace and loving-kindness that made them joyful. For Quinn and Frank, it was an intellectual wonderment that stroked their spiritual passion and scientific curiosity. For Kacy, it was a profound sense of the possibilities of existence that caused mental and physical elation. For Uthai, it was an uncanny happiness brought about by concentrative meditation, far superior than anything he had experienced before. However, Rae did not experience happiness initially because he encountered a practice wholly unsuited to him. Instead, Rae’s determined search for a solution to suffering, together with his
disciplined nature, allowed him to maintain his faith in Buddhism and eventually find the right form of Buddhism and freedom from suffering.

The initial impact of Buddhism on the lives of the nine participants is relatively minor compared with the long-term transformation of their lives. Firstly, all participants experienced much greater equanimity and have cultivated this trait as a vital mean of emotional management. As a result, they are much less likely than they were before to be swayed by negative thoughts or emotions if and when these arise. The result is greater stability of mind that translates into more appropriate behaviour. Equanimity is also a key asset in dealing with adverse happenings and maintaining mental integrity. Secondly, Buddhism has promoted empathy for others. This is achieved by understanding the human nature within oneself including the flaws, defilements and insecurities, and recognising that these are inherent to all human beings. Empathy alters the attitude to engagement with others, as demonstrated by Mia’s and Abby’s activism, and Ray’s attempts at institutional change. Thirdly, Buddhism has provided the participants with means of ridding themselves of the negative conditioning or dependencies that had developed during childhood or from traumatic experiences. This is most notable among the Catholics, Mia and Quinn, who had experienced severe abuse. Arduous effort enabled them to develop a positive self-view which is a prerequisite for spiritual development. Lastly, Buddhism gave purpose and meaning to the participants’ lives, and dharma practice became an art of living and an art of harnessing the power of human capabilities. Purpose and meaning provided security, stability and confidence in themselves to realise higher levels of well-being. In conclusion, Buddhism has allowed the participants to increase their levels of personal sustainability immeasurably; life without Buddhism would be altogether less satisfactory.
CHAPTER 6:
BELIEFS, PARADIGMS AND TRANSFORMATION THROUGH BUDDHISM

6.1 Introduction

Where the previous chapter explored the notion of personal sustainability through an analysis of the participants’ life stories, this chapter focuses on the paradigm the participants subscribe to and the Buddhist beliefs that underpin it. The paradigm of an individual is a mental model of how the world works. It consists of a set of fundamental beliefs and assumptions (paradigmatic beliefs and assumptions) which determines how the participants view themselves and their relationship with the world.\footnote{Another way of understanding paradigms is as “epistemological systems for interpreting reality that ground their picture of ‘reality’ in their own construction” (Milbrath 1995:106).} In short, a paradigm is a framework for living and is a major determinant of behaviour.

As has been reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, the move towards sustainability is necessarily about personal change. The deepest kind of change is paradigmatic transformation, or what Meadows (1999b) calls ‘paradigm shift’ and ‘paradigm transcendence’. Paradigmatic transformation can only occur when key beliefs and assumptions are changed or replaced, and hence these are examined together with the impact on the participants’ life. Thus, this chapter addresses Research Question 2:

To what extent, and in what ways, does seeking to live through following Buddhist beliefs and practices lead to a process of paradigmatic transformation in people's lives?

The focus questions that guided this part are:

1. What are some of the key Buddhist beliefs or assumptions of the participants?
2. How have these beliefs and assumptions been gained?
3. What impact have they had on the participants’ lives?

Answering these questions in the light of the beliefs and experiences of the participants was challenging because conceptualising and interpreting personal constructs, changes in them and the resulting implications for behaviour is a complex task for even the most empathetic of researchers. Indeed, many of the participants found it difficult to enunciate these beliefs clearly. As Limerick (1988:90) notes of interview research, often the answers of participants may simply be “the only answer the participant
Beliefs, Paradigms and Transformation through Buddhism

feels competent to give, having never thought about the question before”. This is a particular issue when seeking to uncover deeply personal insights associated with people’s mental models. As Norman (1983:11) notes:

Discovering what a person’s mental model is like is not easily accomplished. For example, you cannot simply go up to the person and ask. Verbal protocols ... may yield erroneous information, for people may state (and actually believe) that they believe one thing, but act in a different manner. All of a person’s belief structures are not available to inspection, especially when some of those beliefs may be of a procedural nature. And finally, there are problems with what is called the “demand structure” of the situation. If you ask people why or how they have done something, they are apt to feel compelled to give a reason, even if they did not have one prior to your question ... Having then generated a reason for you, they may then believe it themselves, even though it was generated on the spot to answer your question.

Nevertheless, interviewing represents the only direct approach available. Combined with other data gathering techniques, it allows the best possible construction of the mental realities of the participants. Other techniques, such as member checks, are then use to substantiate the mental models that emerge. Practicing Buddhists are also quite unique: practice is the task of exploring fundamental beliefs an individual holds and often replacing them. Thus, practicing Buddhists are often in a better position to answer difficult paradigmatic questions because their life is about exploring these. Practicing Buddhists do not live life ‘normally’. Rather, they seek to unravel the mystery of existence at the deepest level.

This chapter presents this researcher’s constructions of the participants’ beliefs that have been derived from Buddhism. However, rather than providing a complete set of beliefs that forms the participants’ paradigm (which would be impossibly arduous and long), the section highlights some of those beliefs that are critical to the way the participants lead their lives. Each section also provides insight into how these beliefs came about, how they have been used, and the associated transformations they effected. The case of Uthai is analysed first. This is because he provides a systematic treatise on what he believes to be key Buddhist beliefs and their relationship with practice. In contrast, Isaac presents his understanding with a more human approach and draws on years of counselling experience in Western psychotherapy. Abby and Zara introduce the idea that all human experiences can be broken down into sensations, something they both derived from Goenka vipassana practice, and, hence, their beliefs are discussed together. Mia provides an insightful glimpse of Tibetan Buddhist beliefs through an account of how her world was transformed as a result of seeing things differently. Frank reveals how the Zen beliefs that have been part of his life for three decades have totally changed his outlook. Quinn offers a critique of conventional worldviews that have plundered the earth and the human spirit; he forwards new ideas of the self that have made his life more joyful than ever. Kacy provides a different angle to Buddhist beliefs that builds on an intuitive sense of the qualities of human beings that can change the
world. Rae sheds light on the immense power of practice through his spiritual journey that includes the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the findings from all the participants to answer the research question.

6.2 Uthai

Uthai’s experiences provide an understanding of life based on two paradigmatic beliefs of Buddhism - the law of karma and the nature of existence - in the context of Buddhist existential cosmology. Uthai refers to these beliefs as “iron laws” because they are regarded as intrinsic to dhammachart (the way things are) and hence inescapable and applicable to everyone:

The dhammachart that applies to all of us, you and me and everything, there is no exception. No one can escape it. Even bin Laden digging holes however deep cannot escape it, or if you are an astronaut in deepest space with rockets that power you to Mars or Jupiter you cannot escape the iron law. (U14)

Section 6.2.1 describes Uthai’s interpretation of the law of karma and its three principles. Section 6.2.2 discusses the idea of duality and its link with the three characteristics of existence as used by Uthai to explain the nature of existence. Section 6.2.3 concludes by presenting Uthai’s proposition that the practice of mindfulness offers a paradigmatic solution to karma and ordinary existence. Overall, these sections highlight how Uthai offers a systematic synthesis of the Theravada Buddhist path and the key insights within it.

6.2.1 Law of Karma

The first of the two paradigmatic beliefs is the law of karma. Uthai explains that the law of karma is usually not well understood because people do not know that it consists of three principles:

1. Karma is created at every moment
2. Good action produces good results; bad action produces bad results
3. Karma accumulates once committed

In both the interview and the accompanying computer presentation (U25), Uthai places an emphasis on explaining the first and third principles believing them to be much more neglected in dharma teachings.

1. Karma is created at every moment

An erroneous view of karma is that it is created a few times a day with only ‘significant’ actions:

Many people think that in one day we create karma only a few times, like in the morning giving alms to the monks results in good karma. But in the afternoon,
they have an argument with the spouse and think that this is bad karma. This means that karma only occurs one or two times a day. (U14)

Uthai tells us this is far from the truth because “we create karma every moment” (U14). Why is this the case? Because karma is created through mental activities as well as through words and action. Many people do not realise that mental activities that include thoughts, emotions and feelings are karmic formations and that, in fact, these are as real as those formed through other means (U26). Since thoughts, emotions and feelings occur all the time, they account for the most karma produced. In his presentation, Uthai provides percentages to illustrate the point (Figure 6.1).

Which ways do we generate karma?
- through bodily action 0.01%
- through speech 0.01%
- through the mind 99.98%

Figure 6.1: Uthai’s percentage account of karma creation (U25)

As an example, Uthai informs us that he is creating karma during every moment of the interview: one type of karma would result if he thought, “When will this [interview] be over?” while a different type would occur if he thought, “OK, I’ll help him” (U14). The point is that it simply did not matter what he thought; karma was always the consequence.

2. Good action produces good results; bad action produces bad results

The second principle is generally well-known among Buddhists because it is intuitive and simple. Uthai does not elaborate on it except to point to one of his slides as shown in Figure 6.2 which further expands on what good and bad actions are (action includes physical action, speech, feeling, thoughts and emotions).

- good action leads to good results; bad action leads to bad results
- good speech leads to good results; bad speech leads to bad results
- good feelings
  - good thoughts
  - good emotions
    - good results
- bad feelings
  - bad thoughts
  - bad emotions
    - bad results

Figure 6.2: Second principle of karma (U26)
In this scheme, Uthai again stresses the karma created through mental activities.

3. Karma accumulates once committed

Unlike the second principle, Uthai insists that the third principle is not well understood by most Buddhists. While some people believe that actions do not have accumulative powers, Uthai asserts that this is far from the case:

People think that once an action finishes then what’s done is done. Wrong! In fact, it accumulates like one more unit. Like a mud on a pig’s tail, it grows more and more. You might not see that it’s growing but it does, bit by bit. The reason it can grow so big is because it accumulates slowly bit by bit. (U15)

Karma accumulates undetected but the result of accumulation is great because 1) it accumulates all the time, and 2) accumulation occurs over a long period of time. As a consequence, karma turns into habit and eventually into the behavioural core, or *sundan* in Thai (U26). Once the behavioural core is achieved it is difficult to dislodge and it becomes the characteristic of a person. For example, a person can accumulate anger and become an angry person or that person can accumulate calmness and be more at peace:

Someone who has a bad temper … when he sees something he gets angry easily, and it will keep going like this. But some people are very calm and so they accumulate calmness. If they accumulate a lot, then little can get to them. But for some people even seeing a dog walking past can get them angry … but for others it’s no big deal. That’s because people accumulate karma differently. (U15)

This means the character of a person is determined by the different kinds of karma accumulated over the long-term. Another consequence of accumulating karma is that it perpetuates *samara*, the cycle of rebirths (U14, U27–Slide 14), and this is where Uthai links the law of karma with Buddhist cosmology. He asserts that the type of karma accumulated determines the kind of rebirth gained: accumulating good karma results in good birth while accumulating bad karma results in bad birth. Figure 6.3 illustrates different states of existence people can reborn into while Figure 6.4 shows the kind of karma needed to gain each state:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States of Happiness:</th>
<th>Formless realm - 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Form realm - 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deva realm - 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human realm - 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States of Deprivation:</th>
<th>Animal realm - 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hungry ghost realm - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demon realm - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hell realm - 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The numbers indicates sub-levels within each realm)

Figure 6.3: Possible states of existence (U27)
Mental development → Formless realm
Mental development → Form realm
Ethics, generosity → Deva realm
Ethics → Human realm
Delusion → Animal realm
Greed → Hungry ghost realm
Greed, Delusion → Demon realm
Hatred → Hell realm

Figure 6.4: Types of karma and the resulting state of existence (U27)

While only two realms are clearly observable (human and animal), there are six other states of existence possible according to Buddhism. In the states of deprivations, suffering increases incrementally from animal realm through to the hell realm where it is greatest. Accumulating the three defilements (greed, delusion and hatred) causes rebirth in states of deprivation. Accumulating the three grounds for meritorious action (generosity, ethics, and mental development) leads to states of happiness that include human beings. These two slides are greatly simplified schemes but they highlight how the cosmological ideas of Buddhism are intrinsically bound to Uthai’s beliefs. It is interesting to note that these beliefs seemed to be confirmed by personal experience rather than based on faith of doctrines. As an example, Uthai relates the story of how bhavana allowed him to experience one of the higher states of existence:

One day I practiced with intensity and see what happens. And my body disappeared. My body ceased to exist! I really had that feeling. So I can confirm it because I’ve experienced it. So I can say with confidence because ... I really did it seriously and a lot. And this occurred. This experience happened to me. I didn’t realise it at the time but, when I read it, I immediately recognised it ... So I was then able to write about it and show people the consequences of things you accumulate. (U16)

In other words, conviction of the cosmological order was produced by his experiences in bhavana. In this case, the feeling of being without a body corresponds to states of form and formless existence, collectively known as brahma. Another evidence already described in the previous section concerns the ability of bhavana to provide a distinctive form of peace and happiness that was non-dependent on the sensual world. The implication is that these are logical steps toward becoming brahma and that the feelings in such states can be replicated by ordinary human beings.

While the human realm is the lowest in the states of happiness, it is also considered the most important and fortuitous. This is because humans have the greatest capacity to develop (for example, gaining enlightenment) as demonstrated by the Buddha’s birth as a human being. Animals, while able to attain a degree of happiness, find it virtually impossible to self-develop.
6.2.2 Nature of Existence

In Buddhism, the nature of existence is described by the three characteristics of anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) and anatta (non-self). These three paradigms of viewing existence are fundamental to all forms of Buddhism yet they are difficult to understand. Uthai grasped this problem early on during his study of Buddhism, as he describes here using anatta:

Empty of existence, what does it mean? What does it mean? Empty of existence means that things can be anything. One moment it’s this and the next it’s changed. One moment it’s this and the next it’s changed; therefore there is no existence. Empty of existence means that there is no real, permanent existence. For example, if you look like this at present but what about in twenty years time, what will it be like? It doesn’t exist because it’ll change. It’s died. That look has gone. Therefore that means that it’s never existed. But most people won’t understand. Won’t understand, “Yes, it exists. Why do you say it doesn’t?” (U17)

With this realisation, Uthai chose a different way of explaining existence probably as much to help himself as others. The simpler idea he ‘discovered’ is the law of duality and was based on his meditative experience. The law of duality was partly described previously (in Section 5.3.5). This section elaborates further on how duality is a belief for understanding the world, its commonality with the three characteristics of existence and the link with mindful practice to free the self.

For Uthai, the world can be viewed as consisting of dualistic pairs of opposite things. Each person is drawn to liking one half of a pair while disliking the other half. An example is facial attractiveness:

If you like one kind of woman’s face then you will dislike the opposite. If you like women with fair complexion then you will dislike those with dark skin automatically - you won’t want to look at them. “Oh this person is beautiful but this person is not.” (U9)

While this example is simplistic, Uthai contends that it is very much aligned with reality as represented by the Eight Winds of the World found in Buddhist scriptures. The Eight Winds consists of four pairs of opposites:

1. Gain and Loss
2. Fame and Defamation
3. Praise and Ridicule
4. Joy and Sorrow

These pairs are “intrinsic” to every society that has ever existed and, hence, “wherever you are born, in any era - the dinosaur period, the Roman Empire, Mesopotamia or even later on when we find extraterrestrials - once born you will always encounter the basic properties of the world consisting of four pairs and eight elements ...” (U17). These winds affect all equally whatever the status or wealth as
Uthai puts it: “It’s fair game for everyone” (U17). Like karma, there is no escape. Unfortunately, most people in the world do not want all eight elements. Rather they wish for only the ‘positive’ elements of gain, fame, praise and joy while shunning the other four. Even the blessings of Buddhist monks reflect this desire for the impossible. Uthai therefore suggests a different approach for bringing about happiness, one that is completely in tune with reality:

So I say, “Since they will all come, the next time be brave and ask for all eight!” And I demonstrate to them immediately by saying, “I wish to get money and lose money ...” I demonstrate for all to see. Anyone who is brave enough to do this, anyone who dares to ask for all eight things ... that person will be the happiest person in the world. This is what I tell them. Why will that person be the happiest person in the world? Because one day someone will ridicule you and on that day you will be very happy because, “Are you ridiculing me? Wait a minute? Here it is. I’ve asked for it!” Isn’t this true ... asking for the natural way of things. You’ll say, “Thanks, today I’ve completed all the eight things. I had seven but now you’ve completed everything. I thank you.” You should thank the person! (U17)

When asked whether Uthai had encountered the situation himself, he immediately answered affirmative and added emphatically “Thank you very much” to say that he thanked the person for fulfilling his wishes.

Although Uthai does not give explicit reasons how the law of duality links with the three characteristics of existence, two themes are noteworthy: desire and karma creation. Firstly, desire is the desire of most people for certain outcomes such as the four ‘positive’ elements of the Eight Winds already mentioned. But based on Uthai’s experience desire extends far beyond the Eight Winds to include states that describe anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering or unsatisfactoriness) and anatta (non-self). These three interrelated ideas that make up the three characteristics of existence are difficult to explain but one incident Uthai experienced serves to illustrate. At one stage of practice while using the method of watching the mind in the chest area, Uthai began to have slanderous thoughts of the Buddha (U6). These thoughts would plague him continuously and the situation became intractable. Here he describes the problem, his failure to curtail them and the disturbance on his psyche:

My thoughts were vehement insults and criticism. It came out in such a way that I felt that the Buddha was right in front of me and I was berating him. And I could not stop it! It could not be stopped. It was something that tortured me. When I tried to be aware, I found myself insulting the Buddha. But the good side in me was saying, “He is so wonderful. Why are you insulting him?” I replied, “Yes, this is absolutely true but I can't control it!” It was insulting and what can I do? I said to myself if it’s like this I should commit suicide. It was that bad. The Buddha is great and why am I insulting him? I told it to stop but it didn’t. It

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3 During several meditation retreats with Khun Mae Siri in the 1990s, I witnessed this during his presentations to practitioners.
refused to stop. At that time, my total outlook was miserable ... absolutely miserable. Things were unstoppable. (U6-U7)

Out of desperation Uthai went to his teacher for help. Despite his anxiety, the teacher laughed saying that Uthai had the inclinations of a practitioner, and then proceeded to give a surprising advice. The advice was to let the insults flow without holding back or trying to stop. This perplexed Uthai but, with no choice, he tried it:

So I went back and sat down and the insult began blurting out. I did not try to stop it: if it wants to slander, go ahead. I watched and followed it. It kept going and going. After a long while ... insults, insults, insults ... why aren’t you holding back today? ... more insulting, on and on. Didn’t try to stop it ... can keep going. It stopped. It just stopped on its own. And I asked, “Is there any more?” [laughs]. Yes, I asked, “Any more insults? Go ahead.” So more insults and more and more. So it stopped. Again I questioned, “Do some more, go ahead!” – like goading it on. Finally it ended. (U7)

With success, Uthai finally became acquainted with a facet of his mind that he had been unfamiliar with. His attempt to disown it, to stop it and his dislike of it made things worse. There was no magic formula from the teacher; he just taught Uthai to accepts things as they are. From then on, Uthai knew the key to coping with episodes of insulting. From this experience, he gained a profound understanding of the meaning of the three characteristics of existence as applied to the mind.

It won’t stop ... won’t stop. Because things can’t be coerced. This is exactly according to the law: anicca, dukkha, anatta. Anatta and anicca means there is no control ... one cannot force things to happen. The law works in every situation. Even when it stopped and I said, “Is there any more?” more came out. So I challenged it, “Come out! I will watch you. Come out!” So in the end it knew and stopped. (U7)

For Uthai, anicca, which is usually translated as impermanence, also implies no control and no coercion possible. The mind is not self because it resists any attempts to control it. Since it is uncontrollable, it is the cause of suffering because human beings always wish for control. This desire for control of the mind is the same as the desire for only the positive elements of pairs – a naïve desire for the impossible. It is naïve because it is just wishful thinking based on a misunderstanding of reality. The outcome is always the same: pain, anguish and inescapable suffering that accompany us wherever we go and often without our knowing. Naivety and desire – inextricably linked to each other – are underlying factors in both Uthai’s concept of duality and the three characteristics of existence. Naivety and desire also link with the idea of karma because karma is the natural consequence of naivety and desire. When we want something we cannot have, the result is struggle. We struggle in the mind and mind struggle is karma. Often it is negative karma as we are full of anguish to achieve what we want. Even fear of karma is another form of karma and a negative type because fear itself is unwholesome (U7). Therefore we are often deluded to keep struggling. Instead of letting go, we suppress. And the more we suppress, the
more the situation deteriorates as Uthai found out. Hence the root cause of karma is one order down from naivety and desire. Whereas naivety and desire are the result of non-acceptance of reality as described by duality and three characteristics of existence, karma is the fruit of naivety and desire. Figure 6.5 provides a schematic flow of consequences deduced from Uthai’s Buddhist beliefs of the nature of self and world.
6.2.3 Conclusion: Mindfulness as Paradigmatic Solution

How do we overcome desire, naivety, suffering and karma that cause samsara, the cycle of rebirths? Uthai believes that the only way is through the four foundations of mindfulness. In the Pali text, the term for mindfulness is sati and is often found in conjunction with sampajanna, clear comprehension. The direct translation of sati is “call back” meaning “calling back to yourself or coming back to yourself” (U19). Sampajanna simply means “being present” (U19) with what is happening in the body and mind. Putting the two together, Uthai understanding of mindfulness concerns frequently calling back to oneself and being aware of it with clarity. Put another way, mindfulness is about not losing consciousness of self at any time. Mindfulness can occur only in the four situations which are known as ‘four foundations’. The first is awareness of body. The second is awareness of sensations associated with pain or lack of them. The third is concerned with awareness of state of mind. Finally, the fourth is awareness of a complex group of things called mind-objects. Here Uthai describes his understanding of them:

You can do kaya [the body], the vedana [painful feeling], chit [mind] or dhamma [mind-objects]. So you can observe the body, or observe pain whether there’s pain or not and what kind, or you can observe the mind whether it’s happy or not or frustrated or whatever. If you move your body then you know about it. Your feelings you know about it. And dhamma ... well that’s about knowing the state of things as pairs, for example, if the mind is wandering well you don’t have to do much because soon it will be at peace. (U23)

To lend emphasis to this, Uthai recounts the stages in the Buddha’s enlightenment and how he discovered the vital importance of mindfulness as the only way out of suffering and rebirths:

The Buddha gained enlightenment at around 3am in the morning. At 1am, he gained the first stage where he was able to trace back all the lives he was born. The Buddha could go back to millions of lives he was born in. He could see that he had been accumulating merits for a very long time and he saw the endless cycle of rebirths: millions upon millions. That was the first stage of enlightenment. During the second stage at 2am, he knew the karma that caused the kind of rebirth. Supposing that he was born a dog then he would know the specific karma that cause rebirth as a dog. What did he do that resulted in being born a dog ... So he could foretell things. It’s like looking into the hard disk and seeing what was inside from the very beginning, the beginning of the mind. All the information is in the hard disk which would be released accordingly ... But the third stage is most important and in this stage he knew that there was one kind of karma that would not cause the hard disk to accumulate. It will stop the accumulation process. So he knew all the karma and their impact on all the rebirths, and then he understood one kind of karma that would not result in rebirth – there would be no continuation of the process. And this type of karma is ... here it is: the four foundations of mindfulness every instance [pointing to text on computer screen]. (U22)
The analogy of a computer hard disk is apt: data accumulate on a hard disk like karma accumulates in
the mind, and the content of the hard disk determines the functioning of a computer in the same way
that the content of the mind determines the character and behaviour of a person. All mental activities
result in karma formation and hence it accumulates unless there is mindfulness. Since the process of
rebirths is driven by karma, mindfulness stops it at the root.

**Reality through mindfulness**

Why does mindfulness prevent karma accumulation? Uthai explains that this is because “sati will bring
us back and sampajana will help us understand and get in line with dhammachart” (U19). The purpose
of coming back to self is nothing more than to see reality as it is. Uthai provides the example of a taxi
driver to illustrate the point (U12). If while driving on the road you are cut in front by a taxi driver there
are several choices that you can make:

1. Think negatively and curse the taxi driver.
2. Think more positively (or less negatively) e.g. “OK, let him go ... so he can go to hell!” or “I’ll
   let him go. I don’t care ... perhaps he can go and crash!”
3. Think positively: “Their job is as taxi driver and their time is more valuable than mine.” (U12)

These are all options but there is another, better option:

4. Think according to dhammachart: “... there must be pushing and shoving on the roads. There
   must be honking horns and blinking of lights, etc. This is life on the roads.” (U12)

The last option is to instantly realise the nature of reality on the road. The reality can often be viewed as
dualistic, for example, there are “those that drive fast and those that drive slowly, and those that are
patient and those that are hot-blooded” (U12). Only mindfulness can bring about this realisation. Uthai
provides a second example of seeing reality with the story of Ajahn Chah Subhatto. Ajahn Chah was a
famous monk of the Thai Forest tradition in Northeast Thailand. Here Uthai describes an episode
during the construction at his monastery:

One day some disciples were with him [Ajahn Chah] and he was building a new
chapel. So they were inspecting the chapel and there was a crack in the wall. So
when the disciples saw this, they moaned, “Oh, it’s cracking already.” Ajahn
Chah replied, “This is the reason why Buddhism was born.” This is what he
actually said! He didn’t say, “Let’s get the builder in.” He said, with just this
crack, “It is because of cracks that Buddhism came into being.” (U18)

Uthai then explains what he understood by this:

If a perfect wall can exist then cracks must also exist. This is all it took for the
Buddha to be born and Buddhism came about ... because we weren’t able to
understand but the Buddha could, that the real nature of things consists of duality
like this. Therefore anyone who understands will not be affected by things as they realise there are always pairs and you will get both. (U18)

An enlightened human being or *arahant* such as Ajahn Chah⁴ could see the way things are (*dhammachart*) at any given moment. No karma arises as a result. Why? Because karma is defilement of the mind but with seeing reality the mind is unperturbed and so it remains in a joyful state of freedom. Without seeing reality, the mind becomes unstable rocked by likes and dislikes. Hence mindfulness is the great protector of the mind. To put it in paradigmatic terms, mindfulness allows the mind to transcend the normal way of seeing the world based on positive or negative subjectivity. It transcends self and the relationship between self and world. Figure 6.6 is a schematic of the mindfulness process derived from Uthai’s experiences.

![Figure 6.6: Schematic of Uthai’s mindfulness process](image)

As a result, Uthai’s paradigm and the beliefs within it stand in contrast with traditional Western ways of thinking that, for example, regard mind as self, self as real, self and world as under human control, happiness as something that can be grasped and suffering as something to be avoid.⁵ Take the first example of mind as self. Uthai informs us that mindfulness is about observing the mind and this necessarily implies that mind is not self. The mind, like other facets that usually constitute self, is not taken seriously. The mind is just another ‘entity’. All are subjected to the three characteristics of existence: *anicca, dukkha* and *anatta*. Therefore mindfulness tells the real story: that none of these traditional paradigms are true. The happiness that we aim to achieve is illusive because of wrong

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⁴ Ajahn Chah is widely regarded by his disciples and many Thais as an *arahant*. His influence is extensive with branches and associated monasteries around the world including England, Australia and USA. He died in 1992.

⁵ Traditional ways of thinking are associated with theistic traditions and cultures derived from the philosophy of, for example, Descartes and those following his footsteps.
assumptions. Rather, true happiness is about letting go of ideas closest to our hearts. Fixed views are replaced by an emancipatory emptiness. The result is thoroughly unconventional happiness. The result is happiness of whatever comes. Human behaviour is radically altered. Behaviour becomes based on true choice, a choice based on deliberative process leading to the satisfaction of well-being. This is how Uthai lives his life based on seeing reality through the lens of his Buddhist paradigm which is in turn founded on the ideas of karma and the nature of existence, and based on an appreciation of the power of mindfulness to transcend all that they imply.

**6.3 Isaac**

Uthai is quite unique among the nine participants in that he has thought about central Buddhist beliefs for many years and has distilled them into an accessible presentation. On the other hand, Isaac offers a less systematic scheme of Buddhist beliefs. However, his interpretations are insightful because they are based on his unique experiences and continued application over many years. In addition, Isaac is able to blend Buddhism with Western psychology to produce a compelling explanation of human nature and the process of transformation that is his own. This section describes two beliefs close to Isaac’s heart - non-self and letting go - and combines them with his theory of personal transformation. Section 6.3.1 describes the belief of non-self as the idea that nothing in our identity is truly self but merely impersonal complexes that react according to different situations. Section 6.3.2 goes on to explain how this understanding of non-self is important in the process of personal transformation. Section 6.3.3 elaborates on how letting go is a key proposition in Buddhism, and how he teaches it to students. Section 6.3.4 summarises these beliefs and the link with mindfulness as a key instrument in the Buddhist path.

**6.3.1 Non-self**

Isaac was also influenced by the concept of duality as elaborated by Uthai. Indeed, it was the Eight Winds of the World that drew him into Buddhism in the first place. However, he did not seem overly concerned with its paradigmatic use. Isaac seemed more focused on the idea of non-self as pivotal to his understanding of life. To illustrate the meaning of non-self, he describes a seemingly harmless encounter with a colleague that unearthed an embarrassment so great that it revealed an aspect of himself that he had been unaware of:

After I started running these groups for violent men, a few years later the head of the Marriage Guidance Council started doing some as well. We were in contact and I was up in Maine and arranged to meet him. And we were having a conversation like peers and I asked him, “How did you come to do this?” and he
heard it as something like, “What’s your qualifications?” He answered differently because he didn’t hear what I’d said and started saying his qualifications and he had a big, long list of qualifications. And then he said, “What’s your background?” I’ve got no qualification, so I have to just start saying the things that I’ve done. And as I started to speak, I started to burn! I started to burn ... red ... embarrassment - my inferiority complex. (I15)

Fortunately, Isaac was mindful enough to understand the situation and did not hesitate to let the embarrassment play itself out while observing:

But I knew what was happening. I had sati. So I chose not to suppress the burning ... to allow process. So I continued to talk with him while I burned. We talked for another 20-30 minutes and I let it go. I let it burn. Then I got in the car and drove away and I let it burn. And it didn’t pass for another half an hour. (I15)

Isaac attributes this episode for ridding this kind of embarrassment from his psyche. He explains that the practice is called atapas, meaning heat, and involves “burning the defilement”. The defilement in this case is a feeling of inferiority or lack resulting in the sensation known as embarrassment. However, Isaac stresses that defilement is just a complex; it is not self. One should not “take it personally” because to be human is to have complexes. Isaac explains that a “complex makes itself known through identity; that means you and it are the same thing. It’s not a choice - I identify” (I16). However, with awareness this identification begins to fade. A careful examination of the text illustrates the point. When the complex first emerged Isaac fully identified with it and it engulfed his notion of self. It became self. The consequence was that he started to burn. Hence, the description was: “I started to burn” and “I burned”. When Isaac gained awareness he saw the complex for what it was and began to observe it without being bounded to it. Hence, the complex separated out and his description became “I let it burn” denoting an observer observing an object. This is the same as Uthai’s idea of “the knower” observing the mind at work.

Thus, this example serves to highlight the belief of non-self, the idea that the self is merely a collection of complexes a person holds on to. Non-self tells Isaac that there is no reality to self and anything that happens is a manifestation of these complexes and not a manifestation of self. This is true unless one becomes engulfed by the complex and then the mirage becomes very real. So the task of the Buddhist practitioner is to observe diligently but taking care not to suppress. By doing so we can come to a detailed understanding of our mental constituents.
6.3.2 Transformation

Isaac melds Buddhism with Jungian psychology to provide a lucid account of the transformative process. He asserts that the problem is that many people hold on to problematic or distorted complexes and these become their vision of self (I16).

But in fact the vision of self is just that: a vision. It is not real. Therefore transformation is about letting go or, as Isaac puts it, “... you have to die to free yourself of the previous notion of yourself in order to have a transformation of consciousness” (I16). This spiritual death and subsequent beginning is termed initiation, a concept found in many traditions:

Initiation means the start of something but it means here transformative process. This is a Jungian idea but it is in traditional cultures. It’s in baptism in the West: you get drown and born again into the church. The Buddha cut his hair off and he died to his old life and he was born again ... transforming. So it is the symbol of initiation, of starting something. (I17)

That “start of something” is bringing about a new vision of self, one that is more conducive to well-being. However, to do so it is imperative for a new vision to be formed first – a key rule according to the Abhidhamma text of Buddhism. Once a new vision is in place the old one can be let go. As Isaac points out, this kind of change is not enlightenment but it is a necessary step towards it. This kind of change still requires patterns whereas enlightenment is “the place of no pattern” (I16). However, any new pattern must be more in tune with reality than previous ones. As examples, Isaac cites the precepts and the Eightfold Path as some of the possible new patterns.

Isaac explains that the barrier to transformation is attachment to the old vision. Why? Because it has become entrenched in the person’s identity or sense of self, and as Isaac points out, “Even if that identity is extremely negative and destructive, it is still that person’s identity” (I16). Relying on his experience in psychotherapy, Isaac believes that in order for transformation to occur a person must stop “worshipping at an altar of pain” (I17). Citing Jung, he states, “There is no development without sacrifice” (I16). Then he uses a scholarly understanding of language to elucidate the plight of humanity:

See identity is a mechanical term really. In Latin, it is adieum et adieum [which means] ‘again and yet again’ or ‘again and again’. Personality comes from persona - a mask. So in the wisdom of the language there’re a lot of things there. Embarrassment comes from the old Italian word embare, to imprison behind bars. So embarrassment is the type of fear that you have when you step outside of the prison of a too rigid definition of who you are. You step out and up comes the fear. That’s embarrassment but it is a clue: “Hey, I’m identified here. Is this beneficial or is it a prison?” So the two protectors of the world, conscience and decorum, most people what they think is their conscience is merely decorum: following peer pressure, following the rules of the society, the family etc. (I17)
In Isaac’s case, it was a feeling of inferiority that caused his embarrassment during the encounter with his colleague. Through social conditioning he had believed that lack of formal qualifications made him a lesser person. Therefore fear emerged when the fact was exposed. This inferiority complex, something that he may not have even been aware of, had become entrenched in self yet served no useful purpose; on the contrary, it was a hindrance. His task was therefore to confront it when it surfaced and that was what he did until finally banishing it. Through personal experiences and theoretical understanding, Isaac provides an informative account of transformation. There are many obstacles along the way nearly always associated with attachment to facets of the old self. Yet he adds a final irony: “It takes a long time to give birth to a real self, and then you’ve got to let go of it!” (I17 - stress added). With this final thought, Isaac laughs heartily but it is a succinct insight into his Buddhist belief that ultimately nothing is worth holding on to. Forging a new self is equivalent to a paradigm shift but it is only transitory and not a quest for perfection. Ultimately, any paradigm of self is discarded – self is transcended through letting go.

6.3.3 No Control

No control is another idea from Buddhism integral to how Isaac views the world. It concerns the belief that many things in life are beyond the control of human beings and that striving for control is futile and often harmful. Instead, Isaac sees the importance of letting go which means to let go of controlling tendencies and be more in tune with what is. Hence, he teaches his students the principle of DROPS (I17). DROPS is an acronym he coined to stand for:

- D - Don’t
- R - Resist
- O - Or
- P - Push
- S - Soften

For Isaac, Don’t Resist means “don’t barricade yourself against life and thoughts”. Don’t Push means not suppressing anything that comes up in the mind. Soften conveys the idea of “a radical receptivity” to what presents itself. In sum, DROPS is concerned with being totally in tune with reality rather than avoidance or coercion according to one’s wishes. So in meditation Isaac tells his students:

When you are practicing meditation, let go of control. Just be with - your mind wants to think thoughts, let it think thoughts, don’t control, come back to attention and just let the mind think. Will come back to awareness. (I17)
Isaac emphasises letting go because modern society with its technologies and man-made substances tend to make human beings believe that we have control over everything. For example, pharmaceutical drugs and petrol can “confuse the mind into thinking that you are a god, that you are immortal and you are in control” (I17). Isaac believes that Buddhism teaches otherwise and hence his students are encouraged to let go at every opportunity. However, from his experience, Westerners tend to have difficulties with this because of their philosophical roots that emphasise hard reasoning. He bemoans, “So many Western academic over the years see the Buddha as a 1930’s English philosopher in ginger tweed. They think you can intellectualise yourself out of samsara” (I18). On the contrary, Buddhist practice is not about reasoning but about “letting go of the fantasy of control” (I18) or “radical non-interfering” that leaves an “unfabricated state of mind” (I35).

6.3.4 Conclusion

The key beliefs uncovered in this study which shape Isaac’s Buddhist paradigm are non-self and no control. Non-self is Isaac’s belief that self or identity is composed of complexes and that no true self exists. An understanding of non-self offers an opportunity for transformative change as Isaac articulates with the help of Jungian psychology. No control is concerned with letting go and is important both in transformation and other aspects of practice and life. No control is about loosening the instinct to mold ourselves, others and the world in our image because it is an instinct that Isaac believes to be destructive. No control is similar to what Uthai learnt from his teacher when he was haunted by the mind insulting the Buddha. Only when Uthai accepted that he had no control was he able to overcome it. Thus, Isaac teaches the principle of DROPS to his students to help them let go.

A final point: Isaac concurs with Uthai about the importance of mindfulness and the role it plays in allowing the two beliefs to be useful. His definition of mindfulness is very similar to that of Uthai:

*Sati* in ordinary conversational language means memory. So we can say that in meditation practice and in awareness in life, it is remembering to not forget, remembering to not forget to be present ... to be present with this moment ... or remembering to be present with a particular course of action that you’ve decided upon. In a sense, *sati* just knows that and *sampajana* [clear comprehension] knows what it is [that you’re doing]. (I23)

Isaac believes that mindfulness is the beginning of everything. For example, knowing that a complex (e.g. embarrassment) is not self and manifesting itself requires mindfulness. Similarly, letting go of control first starts with awareness of the desire to control. Hence, he concludes that mindfulness is the prerequisite for everything:
The invaluable contribution of Buddhism is the training in attention and clear comprehensión, *sati-sampajana*. Without that you can't apply any of the techniques that are in the world. Without *sati-sampajana* all the good ideas in the world are useless. (I22-23)

6.4 Zara and Abby

Both Zara and Abby received their first taste of Buddhism in India through the meditation retreats of S. N. Goenka. While Zara has remained single-mindedly committed to this *vipassana* technique for over twenty years, Abby has incorporated practices from other traditions such as loving-kindness meditation. Nevertheless, both hold the belief learnt with Goenka as foundational; it determines the conduct of their lives. This belief concerns the idea that all perturbations of the mind manifest themselves as bodily sensations. This means that all thinking, emotions and feelings when they occur are reflected directly and immediately in the body. This understanding is used to alleviate suffering through the practice of redirecting focus from intellectualisation to what is happening in the body. Section 6.4.1 describes the belief and how the experiential practice associated with it is developed in a 10-day retreat. Section 6.4.2 presents examples of how this belief and the associated practice have been applied in Zara’s and Abby’s life. Section 6.4.3 provides a schematic summary of this section.

6.4.1 Mind Perturbation Equals Sensation

The *vipassana* technique of Goenka centres on sensations that arise in the body as a result of mental perturbation. In order to observe sensations clearly, the practitioner must first develop a certain amount of calmness and concentration. Therefore, when attending a standard 10-day retreat, *anapana* (breathwork) is given priority in the first three-and-a-half days, as Zara elaborates:

The first three-and-a-half days is *anapana* which is concentration of the mind and in this particular tradition you work at the base of the nostrils above the upper lip. So with this area here, first of all you start with the inside of the nostrils and you’re aware of every breath as it goes in, every breath as it goes out. And you’re aware of the touches of breath. And then as the mind becomes more and more focused and sharper and more and more settled, then you move to the smaller area here, this triangular area here below the nose above the upper lip. And at that point you are able to feel the chemical reactions happening within the skin from moment to moment ... That sufficiently sharpens and concentrates the mind. (Z3-Z4)

A quiet mind and the power of concentration provide the capacity for observation of sensations that occur throughout the body. So, for the next six-and-a-half days, the sitting meditator practices observation in order to learn about the self. Zara explains:
... on the fourth day we move into *vipassana* which just simply means, as you know, to see things as they are – without craving, aversion or ignorance. Just to accept them as they are. So you start from the top of the head and you feel whatever sensations. People start off usually on the surface of the skin. They’re aware of the touch of the atmosphere or the touch of the cloth or it may just be they get an itching or a pressure or anything like that. And as they move systematically through the body, then the awareness starts to penetrate and they can feel things happening at a deeper level. And they learn that it doesn’t matter whether the experience is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Just observe! That’s all. (Z4)

There are two things of note from this passage. Firstly, observation is incredibly detailed. Sensations are noted at every part of the body and experienced with the utmost clarity possible. As the meditator’s skill grows, sensations become deeper and deeper. It is no wonder then that three-and-a-half days of breathwork are required because this training provides the foundation of stillness and focus necessary. Secondly, Zara provides the meaning of *vipassana* as “to see things as they are – without craving, aversion or ignorance”. Hence this is observation of sensations based on neutrality of mind. Usually the human mind gives meaning to the sensations that arise but the practice of *vipassana* removes the importance of these mental constructs. As Zara explains, *vipassana* aims to move us away from this constant intellectualisation:

So what happens normally in everyday life, if an event occurs and you have strong reaction to that, of either craving or aversion, you usually intellectualise it: “I like it, I like it”, or “I don’t like it”, “That person is a terrible person”. And what we do is we keep replaying that event depending on the intensity of it on the stage of our mind for the rest of our lives. And so what we do is we generate very deep conditions of hatred or very deep conditions of craving. Whereas what happens once you observe at the level of sensations ... now look at this ... sensations are very intense, there’s a lot of heat in the body, arising passing, arising passing ... oh look, it’s gone ... something else has come up. So by observing it at the level of sensations, you’re not rolling in it. That particular conditioning, whether it’s craving or aversion, you’re not suppressing it but you’re just experiencing it as it is. (Z4)

Hence everything – whatever occurs in the body or mind including feelings, emotions and thoughts - is broken down into sensations. Since the self is a combination of these things, the *vipassana* process of detached observation dissolves ordinary notions of self through reductionism. Only sensations are left. This is in tune with ‘seeing things the way they are’. The result is that the practitioner stops accumulating negative conditioning every time a defilement enters the mind. The result is also the understanding that each emotion, desire or sensation is intrinsically temporary:

... it arises just like when a big rain cloud comes, it drops its rain and passes. Nothing is permanent, and this is the other thing that you start to experience in this technique. Everything is arising and passing away. There’s nothing to hold on to; it’s the nature of existence, of the mind. (Z4)
The nature of existence, of mind and body as impermanent is thus a fundamental insight from Goenka vipassana practice. But insight can only occur when one fully understand through experiential practice the idea that everything occurring in the mind produces a sensation. Thus, this belief is the starting point for all practice and has been the critical factor in transformation of behaviour for both Zara and Abby.

6.4.2 Application in Life

Zara and Abby give examples on how the fundamental vipassana belief and its practice of observing sensations have been instrumental to their well-being.

Abby’s relationship with Isaac has always been subjected to much adjustment over the years, a “steep learning curve” as she puts. A major factor was the contrasting personality that produced much stress and strain. As she describes, “Isaac and I often do see things differently. We have quite different responses to things” (A5). In the early stages, there was expectation by each person that the other would have to change in order for the marriage to work. This happened only in the area of communication where they became more open about problems, but the fundamental character of each did not alter to accommodate the other. While this and the maturity that comes with age were also factors, the key ingredients for improving Abby’s relationship with Isaac were equanimity and patience. These qualities were directly brought about by vipassana. In difficult or conflict situations, Abby would observe the sensations that arose rather than react immediately. Thus, there was a gap between stimulus and response and time for more careful deliberation. Deliberation often meant understanding the nature of her husband’s character, something that was probably immutable, and choosing the most appropriate action as oppose to merely reacting:

... there’s also an extent to which now when things are difficult that I recognise that to some extent that’s how he is and then I can wait and choose the right moment to bring things up or decide that for this time I’ll just let that go or I can live with that or not. You know it’s much more of conscious decision now than the reaction that used to happen. (A5)

Of course, her ability to use the vipassana technique to allow this to happen is dependent on the state of awareness. However, through the years this has become “much more continuous” and less likely to fray under pressure. This has allowed her to escape the duress of being “upset in a really intense way by things now than I used to be” (A5).

Zara also provides an example of using sensations to cope with the sway of life. Zara’s husband is a doctor and was recently involved in a highly publicised incident involving the death of a young patient.

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6 Zara remarried after her first husband died.
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(Z9). The incident was politically sensitive and there were much acrimony and accusations. Her husband was pursued by the state health department and endured many things that seemed unethical. This went on for three years. Although he had attended several retreats he did not meditate regularly and the severity of the incident often drove him into depression. Needless to say, it was a very difficult time for Zara and the family. Zara coped during that period through watching sensations. For example, when she experienced anguish she would quickly observe it as sensation. Here she provides an explanation of the constituents of sensations and some ideas of what anguish might feel like:

Anguish ... see all sensations are based on earth, air, fire and water. OK. Fire is heat. Anything to do with ... from the coldest sensation to the hottest sensation. Earth is weight, heaviness ... from the lightest to the heaviest. Air is movement and water is cohesion. So you would say there was lots of air movement: agitation. (Z9)

The four elements of earth, air (or wind), fire and water are the basic elements in Buddhism. Zara is taking an emotion such as anguish and breaking it down into these most basic elements and feeling and observing their sensation. Each emotion or mental state is unique as Zara adds, “Whatever that emotion is, it has its own sensation” (Z9). Since a sensation is devoid of humanly constructed meaning there can be no indulging in it. As she emphasises, the sensation “just manifests and you just observe it. There is nothing to do with it. It’s just arising and passing” (Z9). Through this ability of detachment, Zara was able get through the ordeal while maintaining her sanity and her family’s integrity.

Throughout her life, Zara has remained committed purely to Goenka vipassana. This is because, as she put it, “It’s better to find a path that suits you and stick to it” (Z3). Doing so avoids the confusion of having different teachers giving different advice. She adds that if the technique works – it provides the desired results in daily life – then you should keep at it. Her application of Buddhist practice, not unlike Uthai, is decidedly traditionally Theravada. Hence practice is viewed as a personal spiritual journey as is articulated in this sentence:

I think that the whole technique across all concepts of the Buddha’s teaching, the whole concept is to work toward your own enlightenment. (Z6)

On the other hand, Abby has struggled for much of her life to unify her Buddhist practice with her passion for social justice. Together with an enquiring spirit and anti-authoritarian stance, her practice has become inclusive – a melting pot of different traditions. As already described, one of the strongest influences has been Joanna Macy whose work deals specifically with Buddhism for engagement. As a result, Abby places a great deal of importance on viewing the self, society and environment as interdependent. This then forms the basis for regarding not only changing the self but also changing the world as the spiritual path. It is the basis of a call for greater activism among Buddhist practitioners. Thus, Abby regards personal transformation, and its associated techniques such as the vipassana
technique of observing sensations, as firmly within and critically inseparable from the context of social transformation. For Abby, Macy’s technique provides the tools for dissolving the sense of separateness among human beings especially those with opposing views:

I saw that this [Macy’s technique] was a much more sustainable philosophical basis for activism than this duality of us versus them way of doing things that I had been doing before that. (A9)

Dissolution of duality was crucial in her attempt to eradicate the compartmentalisation of life that barred dynamism of self in world. Thus, Abby’s use of *vipassana* is somewhat different to Zara in that it is situated within a structural as well as a personal approach to Buddhism. Recognising the self as sensations occurs within an acute awareness that the act has dual purpose: to alleviate suffering of self and to alleviate suffering of world.

### 6.4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, despite philosophical differences, Goenka *vipassana* has provided Abby and Zara with a fundamental belief and practice for living. The belief regards human experience, indeed existence, as consisting of sensations that occur as a result of mental reactions or defilements. Practice is the task of observation without judgement, that is to say, the task of not reacting to these sensations. Doing so provides an understanding of mental and physical phenomena as fleeting, and hence a realisation of the futility of dwelling in them (Figure 6.7). This has resulted in behavioural changes that have been positive for Abby’s and Zara’s well-being. Another way of understanding *vipassana* practice is as a deconditioning process: to remove or reduce the intensity of reactions to things considered positive or negative. For Zara and Abby, *vipassana* is a way of dealing with whatever happens in the mind to generate equanimity. The result is less suffering and a greater acceptance of life and its dramas.

1) **Thought, feeling, emotion**

2) **Sensation in body** ← ← ‘Pure’ Observation

3) **Equanimity**

4) **Truth of existence**
   – all mental & physical phenomena transitory

Figure 6.7: Scheme of Goenka *vipassana* thinking and practice
In the case of Abby, though this belief and practice is deep-rooted in her outlook and behaviour, it has been incorporated into the greater scheme of how she views the world. For her, that world is an interconnected place and vipassana practice is seen not an individualistic pursuit but as an intrinsic part of activism. Thus, her practice is the practice of increasing her own well-being and, with direct intentionality, the well-being of others.

6.5 Mia

The paradigmatic beliefs Mia derived from Buddhism are somewhat different from those of Uthai, Isaac, Zara and Abby. Mia’s experience can best be described as a paradigm shift from a conventional view of the world to one based on Tibetan Buddhism. It is a more theoretical approach but is suited to Mia’s intensely inquiring nature and the impact on behaviour is just as powerful. Section 6.5.1 documents how this paradigm shift came about when Mia began to study Buddhism, became astounded by how much sense it made and adopted the whole of its teachings as an intellectual roadmap. Section 6.5.2 expounds on the teachings she discovered, especially the idea of karma, and how they changed her thinking towards other people. Section 6.5.3 continues this by describing her understanding of suffering and how she began using Buddhist practices to rid herself of suffering. Section 6.5.4 provides an example of how Buddhism was capable of producing a real-life paradigm shift, in this case changing Mia’s view of her father through an out-of-body experience. Section 6.5.5 summarises the findings of this section.

6.5.1 Intellectual Roadmap

Mia’s paradigm shift is, like everything else, related with her attempt to achieve personal sustainability and to deal with the maladies of a dysfunctional family. Smouldering anger was one such symptom and something that had to be dealt with because she lived under its spell for so long. Buddhism provided her with a description of human nature that included a detailed explanation of how emotions such as anger arise and the subsequent impact. She explains:

... Buddhism gave me a way to look at ... I want to say that I’m not as angry as I used to be, and that’s not from some amazing miracle of meeting Buddhism. It just gave me a structure of understanding why I was angry, and how not to be angry. Because it’s not just psychological, it incorporates faith [and] it incorporates interconnectedness: how the function of mind works, how when we experience something, how it goes into a feeling which triggers an emotion which triggers an action which creates karma. And when karma is returning, how that can trigger off those seeds. I mean it is so complex, Buddhism, but it makes so much sense. So the more I studied and looked into what Buddha taught about the 84,000 afflictions ... he talked about, I think, the 84,000 afflictions that the
human mind can get caught up into. And the more I studied them and pieced them together, how it all, you know, dependent arising, how things affect another thing and how it’s all connected together…. I saw very clearly that everything was suffering. I had already seen that very clearly when I was younger. So this was not [just] saying that, yes, everything was suffering; it was saying but we can stop it. (M9 – stress in original)

There are several noteworthy points from this passage. Firstly, Buddhism tells her that the human mind can suffer 84,000 afflictions but it also describes the cause of these afflictions. Anger is one of those afflictions and hence Buddhism provides Mia with a “structure of understanding why I was angry” (M9). And what is that structure of understanding? It is based on a description of afflictions as one event in an interconnected chain of many. Thus, like previous participants, Buddhism had the effect of de-personifying emotions that arise removing them from notions of ‘I’, ‘mine’ and ‘self’. Mia’s attachment to these emotions was once so strong that even everyday situations often overwhelmed her. Buddhism dispelled that attachment entirely by telling her that “none of it is about you” (M10). Rather, these emotions have everything to do with the deluded mind that lacks clarity and “impute[s] on a situation something that might not be the case” (M10). In other words, a mind tainted by emotions generates assumptions that are not true. The consequence is further engrossment of mind in a self-created world divorced from reality. Mia’s self-created world, or self-created paradigm of existence, was unfortunately built mostly on anger and hence Buddhism was the mean to map herself out of it. Here she uses metaphors to describe the role of Buddhism in her life and how she was able to distance herself form anger:

You know, it’s a guide. It’s a user’s tool [laughs]. It’s like a computer and it’s like you can write while you’ve got this going on and this here and you’re angry, and you think it’s the object that you’re angry at but it’s actually that ... that object doesn’t have an inherent quality that makes everybody angry toward it. [Rather,] that’s your mind that’s having an angry reaction to that object ... And so when I could piece it out like that, I got to see things clearly, more clearly. I got to put them down and say, “Oh wow, look at that. I’m reacting at that.” So, for me, it’s the most useable tool. (M9 – stress in original)

This understanding that there is no “inherent quality” in any object, experience or situation is an important point. In human society, values are always attached to objects from the earliest age. It is a conditioning that provokes a reaction when something happens. The reaction is usually spontaneous without much volitional control. Through Buddhist theory, Mia was able to understand and also glimpse that dissociation was possible. She could break free from the reactive forces that once dominated her life. Hence Buddhism became a tool, albeit an intellectual one, that caused a paradigm shift in how she viewed her human nature.

7 This is something reinforced by Mia’s matter-of-fact tone and impersonal, theoretical sentences found in this part of the interview.
6.5.2 Karma

A second point from the passage is the prominence of the concept of karma. Karma explains how mental formations arise eventually resulting in action and how this cycle perpetuates. Here Mia explains how the law of karma changed her thinking from one of reactivity to one of personal responsibility:

You know, sometime people do inconsiderate or nasty things towards me, I don’t necessarily get angry at them any more because I think, “That’s interesting that that’s happening.” You know, I just don’t see things as automatically bad and get irritated because I have dealt with the anger a lot more. And so instead I’m seeing things more like, “Well, it’s interesting that that would happen because I’ve created the causes for everything that’s happened.” I mean that is cause and effect and that’s really the law of karma. So it’s interesting that that’s happened. And for me to get angry at them brings back my karma, really. I should be angry at me for creating the cause of the karma in the first place. (M10-M11)

Thus, the idea of karma has taken the blame out of others and shifted the focus to Mia’s own actions and their consequences. Rather than dwell on the past or actions of others, she sees that it is up to her to create the conditions necessary for her own well-being. Given the destructive culture of her family that shifted blame on to the children, this change in mindset is significant. One result has been that she is “more in the moment” meaning that she is more concerned with present needs rather than being engrossed in her own melodrama of victimisation (M11). As shall be seen, this is a similar situation to Quinn who was also raised as a Catholic. Another impact has been a more level-headed approach to negative news such as wars and terrorism that would have once incensed her:

I understand why people hurt each other now. Before, it would send me into absolute distraught when I see wars and stuff. And now I sort of think, “Ah, these people are creating all these causes because they believe so much in something and they don’t see the bigger picture and they don’t see the results are killing them: car-bombing each other and going into other people’s countries and shooting people.” You know, they have no idea of the terrible lifetimes ahead of them. Really! Actually, I feel more compassion than anger now. I really do. (M13)

The idea of karma has provided her with a concept for explaining human behaviour and its consequence. Karma contains fundamental assumptions (as already described by Uthai) that are different from other religious or materialistic worldviews. One assumption is that rebirth is unavoidable under normal circumstances. Hence, people who do not believe this will have a short-term orientation that is reflected in their action. Without ethics, this can easily degenerate into hostilities and they will suffer “terrible lifetimes” in the future. With Buddhism and karma, Mia is beginning to accept the world as it is: a world in which not everyone understands and that is why the world is violent. However, this realisation has not induced her into abjectness, changed her position on life, or dissuaded her from
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engagement. Rather, it has allowed her to do these things in a wiser and more compassionate way (M13).

6.5.3 Suffering and Way Out

The third and last point from the passage is that Buddhism has allowed Mia to comprehend succinctly the paradigm that life is suffering. She had seen that growing up and living with abuse. She had seen it through her activism – how sensible actions were ignored in a world bent on conflict and environmental destruction. Now she understood why, and the reason is that anyone with the 84,000 afflictions is in a state of suffering. Unfortunately, this is the state of mind of most people all the time including herself. However, and more importantly, she understood that there was a way out of it. In her words, Buddhism “was not [just] saying that, yes, everything was suffering; it was saying but we can stop it” (M9 – emphasis in original speech). Knowing that suffering could be halted elated her, gave her cause for optimism and was a key to continual faith in Buddhism. Unfortunately, it is not an easy path. For now, Mia uses two techniques: the practice of compassion and the confrontation of pain. In the former, compassion is felt for all sentient beings “seeing them as my mother and exchanging myself for them” (M10). In other words, she tries to reach out and feel the deepest empathy. As a result, she is kinder to other people and is less judgmental (M10). On confronting pain, she borrows from vipassana the idea of mindful experiencing and tries to sit with whatever comes up. During the times she has practiced, great suffering has emerged. She believes that the trauma of abuse is the cause but in the past she has shunned feeling the pain and gone into dissociation:

I think people who have been bashed violently, they as children, as a way to cope, they pop up out here, their consciousness. Because if they’ve got to stay in their body, it’s going to hurt too much. It’s a coping mechanism, of disassociation. So I’ve learnt that I disassociate a lot; so I’ve learnt to keep myself staying in my body. And when I keep myself in my body, then I have to feel this painful stuff – like all this stuff that’s happened to me. And when I do that, instead of jumping out again which is so easy for me because it’s like a three lane highway going up there [above the head], you know what I mean. But it’s like being tortured down in here. So when I stay in my body, then I really focus on the breath, and I remember why I’m here and then I just allow it to present. (M20)

Not numbing out is the key to living. For Mia experiencing pain is about getting back to her true self, one that she has had to “leave behind” on many occasions. As she explains, “There needs to be somehow quite a healthy self for there to be no self;” (M20) meaning that a person needs to heal
psychologically before ultimate realisations of dharma are possible. In order to heal, that person must grasp the nature of difficult emotions or pain and be able to deal with them; that is why she has chosen to confront pain. In summary, Buddhism has given her a way of understanding her life as suffering but it has also provided her with practices for confronting that suffering. This she believes is the way forward to a new life freed from the shackles of her past.

6.5.4 New Understanding of Father

This is the story of how Mia came to see her father in a new light. It is the story of an experiential paradigmatic shift brought about by meditation and reinforced by Buddhist ways of viewing the world and taking responsibility to make that world a better place.

On one occasion, Mia’s father was drunk at a restaurant, cursing and swearing. Having been brought up in fear of her father, the experience made her shudder to the core—an uncontrollable terror—and it triggered the deep feeling of self-hatred: she scoffed at herself in the mirror thinking, “You’re fat,” seemingly for no particular reason (M16) but it was probably a throwback to an old habit of over-eating to repress emotions (M32-M33). Fortunately, she had learnt vipassana walking meditation and began to practice that in earnest when she got home. She describes what happened next as an “out-of-body experience” that took her into the body of her father during his childhood:

I was in the body of a young boy being yelled at and I became aware I was my dad ... and so he’s come back from boarding school wanting to see his darling mother who was really the matriarch and the leader of the entire Maclaren family. And she was yelling at him saying, “Look what you’ve done! You’ve ruined this energy here. You’ve created ... look at the other kids, they’re upset. It’s all your fault ... rrrhhhh!” And she’s yelling at him in her Irish Catholic nasty sort of way. And he’s sort of “Ah! ... [little, scared voice]”. And then the next minute the announcement that his father had died and he was twelve years old. He was ... it was almost like ... I had the mind of him until I realised that, “Hang on, this is ... I’m doing walking meditation ... why am I here?” And when I realised that’s when I got the announcement that my dad had died and then I was my dad and I felt ‘cctt’ [sudden sound!] (M16-M17)

As she recounts, the death was an incredibly painful experience for her father and how she felt for herself “how it was so dreadful”. Feeling his pain through death and maternal domination, something she had not known before, gave Mia insight into her father’s psyche:

And it suddenly occurred to me, when I went home to visit him, he had done to me what she had done to him. And I realised that he had only brought that energy

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8 This idea is similar to Isaac’s although Mia arrived at it through personal understanding whereas Isaac was influenced by Jungian psychology. It is also very similar to the concept of personal sustainability as articulated in Section 3.7 and used as the key theme in Chapter 5.

9 “My dad” refers to the father of Mia’s father. This sentence seems to be an attempt by Mia to speak as if she was her father.
up – he didn’t know why he was so angry with me but I realised why the energy came up was not because he was angry with me but because he needs to resolve ... this stuff that had happened with his mother: why did she treat him like that when he got home from boarding school? (M17)

Grasping the forces at play, she realised that his behavioural problems were the torment of a boy who could not cope with his past. How could she be angry with a person like that? Therefore, she began to detach from the sordid history - the key lesson from the incident. With understanding and detachment comes choice: the choice of how to respond in the best way to a difficult situation:

So he’s dumped it at me but I actually can now, through doing the meditation, not grasp to my own reaction to it. I can now respond to him like saying, “How are you feeling just now dad?” Do you know what I mean? Like, through this practice, I’m now not so caught up in my own drama and my own pain because I see the bigger picture. The bigger picture is there is no small Mia. (M17)

Thus, through practice she has come to term with her father’s behaviour: the behaviour of a man in dire need of resolution. Through practice she has come to an understanding of suffering as an act of immersion in one’s own reaction. However, suffering only occurs if the self is small, the “small Mia” as she puts it. A small self is solely focused on his or her own reaction without seeing “the bigger picture”, that is to say, without seeing things in their perspective. This small self is an illusion and must be dispelled because the true self is interconnected with and inseparable from other beings. Buddhism has been entire responsible for these changes in worldview and, like other participants before, it has given her choice: the choice of how to act in a way that is conducive to the well-being of everyone. These new ways of thinking have allowed her to move on and put out the amber perpetuating the flames of anger. As a result, “the relationship between my father and I is just remarkable now!” (M18). While Mia’s father remains bitter to this day as the incident at her sister’s wedding testifies (M18-M19, described in Section 5.3.1), her attitude and behaviour towards him have altered and this has been the key to a more positive relationship. The focus is now on her mother, an alcoholic for twenty years, and, as Mia proceeds, she is beginning to discover similar results (M19-M21). Her life is turning for the better in dramatic ways because of new approaches to living based on Buddhism.

6.5.5 Conclusion

Mia has adopted Tibetan Buddhism whole-heartedly as her intellectual roadmap - her life’s paradigm. Tibetan Buddhism contains many important beliefs for understanding how the world works. This section has highlighted the ideas of karma and suffering and how these have impacted Mia’s life. Karma has given her an understanding of human behaviour and why things happen. It has removed the blame from others and placed the responsibility of action on her shoulders. It has also injected a dose of compassion into her attitude towards others as she ponders the fate of those lacking knowledge of
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karma. Suffering, on the other hand, is not only about understanding that existence is suffering but also that there is a way out of this suffering. Thus, Mia has engaged in practices that alleviate suffering and confronted conditionings that have plagued her for much of her life. Lastly, Mia has achieved a radical shift in understanding of her father and this has been instrumental in improving their relationship. Through a meditative experience, she was able to fathom how her father was mentally scarred during childhood and how this affected his life. This has resulted in a deep empathy and a resolve not to allow the negativity that has been passed on to her to impinge on her life in the same way. Through Buddhism, Mia’s life has turned around and it continues to progress as her understanding of paradigm and practices deepens.

6.6 Frank

It is extremely difficult to describe comprehensively how Frank sees the world after thirty years of practice because Zen eschews conceptualisation. However, this section highlights some of the important worldviews, beliefs and assumptions that form the foundation of Frank’s life and govern how he views himself and others. In other words, it is an investigative journey to gain insight into what constitutes his paradigm and its impact on action. Section 6.6.1 starts by describing Frank’s Zen practice because this is critical to understanding the way he thinks. Section 6.6.2 looks at how practice and the beliefs they assume are used in real life examples. Section 6.6.3 concludes by summarising Frank’s paradigm as consisting of a practice part and an existential part.

6.6.1 Practice

To understand Frank’s paradigm is to understand his practice. This consists of three facets: sitting meditation, teaching and practice in daily life.

1. Sitting meditation

Frank practices sitting meditation for up to two hours everyday (F2) including sitting twice a week with his Zen group (F33). When times are busy and formal practice is not possible, Frank will sit several short periods throughout the day, for example, he might lock his office door and sit for five minutes to “touch base” (F2). The objective of sitting meditation is to observe the mind and the body:

... in our sitting meditation, we spend a lot of time sitting quietly observing thoughts but also giving our attention to bodily sensations, and to the way in which many thoughts are accompanied by particular body or states of body. (F3)
It is important to observe thoughts because “our thoughts are what we often act on” (F3). In an unsettled mind, persistent observation is important to prevent thoughts from overwhelming us. However, practice should also go beyond thoughts, to the direct experience of the body:

... ultimately experiencing the body, “re-embodying” the practice, is central. But if thinking is active, then we need to start with it until we can proceed into the body. It is in the body and in the direct and unmediated experience of it as the container of our experience that true healing takes place and through which we open a window into something greater. (F33)

As an aid to observation breathwork is sometimes useful because the breath is “strongly experiential” (F26). Breathwork provides a ‘base’ for observation. It includes the counting of breath and the various forms of breath observation. However, Frank emphasises that breathwork or any other techniques, important as they are, should only be regarded as “provisional steps” (F33). Ultimately he concludes, “... practice is not about any technique or set of tools; it is not about doing anything. It is, as Dogen-zenji says, about the dropping away of body and mind” (F33).

2. Teaching
Frank is the leader of the Still Zen Group and he regards his activities within the group as practice. One important activity is one-on-one interview with students and here Frank’s practice is “the practice of giving a student complete attention and then trying to respond appropriately to that student and to the difficulty that they might be having or to the question that they might be posing” (F2). Simply put, listening is a prominent part of practice during teaching.

3. Daily life practice
Frank endeavours to make everyday life as much part of practice as formal sitting meditation. As Frank describes, it is about “the way that we behave toward others, the kinds of behaviour we have, the way in which we monitor our behaviour, [and] what we learn from monitoring our behaviour, monitoring our speech, monitoring our thought” (F2). Hence this form of practice is about the orientation of self toward others through being vigilant and being aware. It leads to action with “full awareness” and translates directly into behaviour in accordance with the paramita of conduct, or perfections of conduct, highly valued because it is the behaviour of those seeking Buddhahood (F3).10

Frank emphasises that all facets of practice are interrelated, for example, his ability to teach is dependent on his general level of practice, as he states: “One’s ability to teach is only as good as one’s practice” (F2). He also stresses that one should not be fixed to any ideal way of practice, for example, stipulating the number of hours of sitting meditation per day, because this can become a burden that

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10 There are ten perfections: giving, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy or effort, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity (Nyanatiloka 1980).
cannot be lived up to. On the contrary, practice should be adaptive, meeting the requirements or conditions that life presents. The key is not rigidity; rather it is about making “consistent effort” (F3). This is because the essence of practice is not any outwardly form or method. Rather, it is about “reminding oneself to come back to just what the present moment is, to just what is occurring right now, to what one is thinking, to what one is feeling, [and] to what reaction one is having” (F3). Thus, Frank believes that the present moment is the key to practice, this being universal to all forms of Buddhism:

... I think all Buddhist practice fundamentally is about becoming aware of what the truth of this moment is. And this moment is not some ... doesn’t have to be understood as some cosmic moment. It needs to be understood as a moment of thought and feeling - thought, feeling and reaction. That’s the truth of the human moment. (F4 – stress in original)

In the long-term, the purpose of practice is gradual cultivation of the mind (F6) to one that is capable of seeing momentary truth over and over again. To achieve this and be able to “meticulously actualised [it] in one’s life and everyday practice” can lead to something truly transformative (F33).

6.6.2 Understanding Frank’s Paradigm through Examples of Practice

Frank’s practice is the practice of dealing with human experiences through observation. Described below are two examples he gave together with explanation on how practice works.

1. Angry thoughts

Frank provides a hypothetical example (although it is likely that he has had a similar experience) of being in a meeting and various thoughts coming into the mind. For example, such meetings might involve difficult discussions in which a person might conclude about another:

“What that person said is stupid.”

“What that person said is unacceptable.” (F4)

Frank explains that before long, such thoughts might lead to deeper worries that result in thinking, for example:

“That person doesn’t respect me!” (F4)

Such a progression of thought may be very disturbing if driven by anger or dislike. Thus, Frank argues that, at this point, it is vital to collect oneself and make a conscious effort to notice the thought. Otherwise, one might become caught up in it so much so that “it rules the situation” (F4). Noticing the thought involves labelling it: “Having the thought that that person is stupid. I’m having the thought,” the idea being to distance oneself sufficiently as not to let it dominate (F4). Frank says that while this
might be a beginner’s practice it is something that can be applied throughout life. In labelling thought, one option is to verbalise it in the mind thus making the distancing explicit. However, as practice advances, it is possible to ‘see’ the thought as it appears. Other signs may also give it away, are as important and should be observed in the same manner. Frank elaborates:

Sometime it’s the “Hhrr!” in the body that you first observe: OK it might be a strong feeling in the body; it might be a subtle feeling in the body; it might be a slight tension; it might be a slight feeling of anxiety; it might be a sensation that has no description – it can be an abstract sensation but it’s there; it might be feeling warm, hot ... feeling cold, feeling an emptiness, feeling ... could be anything, but it’s a sensation. And when there is such a sensation we should pay attention to it. We should direct attention to it as much as we can. (F4)

However, Frank cautions that the objective of labelling is not to make the thought or feeling go away (F5). After all, all thoughts come and go often of their own accord; this is the mind working. The objective is merely to see that thought - in this case, it is the angry thought, “That person doesn’t respect me!” Doing so allows one to fully acknowledge the feeling of animosity toward others. Once it is truthfully seen and acknowledged, we have the opportunity to avoid following its beckoning:

... the important thing is not to try and get rid of it; the important thing is to watch it and to avoid acting on it. Right? The thoughts themselves are neutral. The thoughts have no reality, right? What has reality is the way I act from them and the way I believe those thoughts. If I believe those thoughts are real, “That person is stupid,” ... if I believe that and I act on it then I do harmful actions. And if I just see the thought and if I see, “Uh huh,” having that thought, having that sensation, but I’m not going to act on it. (F5, stress in original)

Hence the task of practice is:

... to come to see that such thoughts, which are common for a human being, do not constitute objective reality, but a filtered and unexamined version of it. Practice is always about returning to “what is true right now”, not believing everything we are telling ourselves about ourselves, others or the situations we encounter. (F34)

By ardently labelling thoughts, the chance of harmful conduct can be minimised though not eliminated (F4). This is easily achieved in formal meditation where attention is clearly on the mind but is less feasible in everyday situations. In the latter case, it is necessary to check back frequently to what one is thinking and feeling (F4). Frank compares this checking back to shining a torch back on oneself, the light revealing the state of the mind. Thus, the practice of labelling can accompany any of life’s circumstances and is instrumental in determining the practitioner’s behaviour.

2. Taking care of an elderly relative

Frank recounts the story of how he had to take care of an elderly relative up until her death. For many years when she was still well, he would visit her every weekend and they would go out together. They
would explore many places in the region and this would give her much pleasure. Frank was the only relative and a responsible and dedicated one at that. However, while sitting in the car observing himself before picking her up – something he did often - he would sometime feel a reluctance at the prospect. Here he explains what happened:

... what I was thinking and feeling was: “I don’t really want to do this. I know that it gives her pleasure but I don’t want to do this. I just don’t want to do this.” Now, that’s human. Sometimes even what we know is a good thing to do we don’t want to do it. “Doesn’t serve me. I’d much prefer to go off and spend the afternoon having coffee with my friends or whatever.” (F15)

Having taken up Zen for many years, he knew that every situation was a chance for practice and this was no exception. Rather than repressing his reluctance, Frank experienced it, acknowledged its existence and accepted it for what it was: part of his human nature. He explains that this is crucial in any relationship otherwise, the purity of the relationship is tarnished:

If you don’t acknowledge that, that you have that resistance then in some way the relationship is coloured by that. So you must experience that and you must acknowledge it. You must know that you have those feelings and thoughts. Know that you have those reactions in the body. And having experienced it, then just get on with it. Just do what you need to do! And keep checking back in. (F15)

Simply to acknowledge his disposition was an act of distancing that negated its power. He could then proceed with a clean slate not having taken it to heart. Through this practice and constantly “checking back in”, he was less likely to be troubled by negative emotions that might have followed because they would have had less potential to illicit actions that could sour the relationship. It was as if he was on guard and to be in such a state allowed him to experience the enjoyment that often emerged during their excursions. Rather than be held back by thoughts and feeling – all inventions of the mind – he chose to get on with the job and find fulfillment doing it.

6.6.3 Conclusion: Frank’s Twin Paradigms

Both of the examples above demonstrate the essence of how Frank sees the world through practice, his practice paradigm. A key belief of this paradigm is the idea that thoughts do not in any way constitute reality - thoughts are not reality. This means that thoughts do not have any inherent meaning to them. Rather, thoughts become real, become concrete, only when one believes in or acts on them. Thus, Frank’s practice is the practice of seeing thoughts as they are unadulterated by the human mind – something he refers to as the “truth of the human moment” (F4). When one is able to do this then one can decide what thoughts are grounded in objective reality and what thoughts are not (F33). In this way, practice enables appropriate behaviour to take place because behaviour and thoughts are entirely separate and decisions are made through critical examination rather than impulse. This applies equally
to feelings, emotions and sensations where the process is the same. Hence, practice is a method of allowing behaviour to be based on consideration of true well-being of oneself and others.

The example of looking after an elderly relative illustrates the use of this practice paradigm in a real life situation. It was precisely because Frank understood that thoughts are not real and that all he had to do was to acknowledge them as something the mind secretes that he was able to perform his duty to the elderly relative. Had he not understood this, his experience would have been marred or he might have avoided taking her out on future occasions. Rather, he chose to take those thoughts to practice seeing their negativity and destructive nature – then let go. Thus, he was able to perform all his duties until her death. These included the duties during the last period of her life when she was beset with illnesses and he had to make difficult decisions. Many times Frank was inundated with strong emotions and doubt. However, they were incorporated into practice, the practice of experiencing and understanding his humanity to the full. Frank’s paradigm became a paradigm of freedom – freedom from the power of thoughts, emotions and feelings to control his life.

Freedom from the power of thoughts has allowed Frank to view the world differently. It is based on the Zen concept of emptiness where emptiness is defined “not as the absence of anything but as the complete interdependence of everything” (F10). Hence the transformation is one where any notion of separateness turns into an understanding of deep connection, or in his own words:

We begin with a view of ourselves as separate, but we through practice can come to a view of ourselves as dependent and interdependent. (F10)

The idea of interdependence of himself and others has become foundational to how he acts and how he interacts with others. It has become an existential paradigm that pervades life. His embrace of interdependence also turns practice from an individualistic pursuit into something universal. Practice is not something one does for personal gain; one practices for the happiness of all.

6.7 Quinn

Quinn is well-versed in Buddhist concepts and has taught them for many years. However, one theme stood out during the interview and especially in the articles he has written. This concerns his belief that human beings erroneously view self as fixed, separate and real, and the potential, indeed the necessity, for transformation of this view through Buddhism – a paradigm shift of the mind. This is a complex subject that is theoretical in nature, but which has severe ramifications for personal and social outlooks in life. Its importance is borne through the experience of Quinn and his struggle to free himself from negative conditioning.
Section 6.7.1 describes the conventional belief that self is fixed, something that Quinn believes to be false and a hindrance to personal growth. Section 6.7.2 details the other conventional beliefs of self as real and self as separate, and how Quinn believes them to be responsible for environmental degradation. Sections 6.7.3 and 6.7.4 outline Quinn’s opinions on the origins of these erroneous beliefs. Firstly, Section 6.7.3 concerns the contribution of Christianity, materialist philosophy and psychology. Secondly, Section 6.7.4 discusses Quinn’s theory of how our humanness, especially human self-consciousness and physiology, is a fundamental contributor to these deluded beliefs of self. Section 6.7.5 documents how Buddhism’s optimism for human potential was a radical proposition that altered Quinn’s mindset. Section 6.7.6 concludes by reviewing Quinn’s twofold paradigmatic shift.

6.7.1 Self as Fixed: a False Paradigm

Quinn argues that many people, especially Westerners, are bounded by a fixed sense of self (Q15-Q18, Q37, Q38, Q51). In his words, people believe that “we’re fixed and we can never change. An old dog can't change its spots” (Q16). A person who believes this holds the view that “I am what I am what I am” (Q18). According to Quinn, this belief is so ingrained that it has become a major barrier to spiritual growth because it stops us even before we start, that is to say, it rules out the possibility of growth even before we attempt it. Thus, it is a serious erosion of personal responsibility by undermining the notion of human capacity. In society, it often leads to a curious situation where some people profess themselves to be “the greatest thing on the face of the earth” while others chastise themselves for being a failure (Q16). However, Quinn tells us that there is no difference between egotism and self-hatred. Rather, they are both conceited views – views congealed around an unrealistic model of what a person should be (Q15). This model is often handed down through culture and causes a person to look at the world in a rigid way.

6.7.2 Self as Real and Separate

Quinn believes that the other monumental mistake is to view self as real and separate (Q17, Q33, Q34-36, Q39). Thus, people believe that they are ‘real’ meaning they regard themselves as solid, separate entities. With this view deeply buried in consciousness people experience a feeling of separation between themselves, others and nature as the norm in life. Unfortunately, this separation is harmful because it creates two major problems. Firstly, it produces “a deep, existential state of tension” characterised by a “sense of aloneness, incompleteness and therefore insecurity” (Q36). One way to

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11 As will be described later, ‘real’ and ‘separate’ are related concept stemming from the same cause.
12 This may be similar to the existential fear Frank felt during his early adulthood. It is an insecurity, loneliness or emptiness – often indescribable in words – that we feel during certain moments in life.
mask or distract from this tension is to seek pleasant things and immerse in the acts of craving them. However, not only is this a temporary solution but it also results in problems of environmental degradation (Q33). As Quinn writes, the belief in separation is entirely misplaced and rebounds negatively on human society:

Last week we posed the question of considering the consequences of manipulating the natural environment on the basis of a belief that it really is separate from us, when in fact it isn't? If it really is separate from us we can do anything we like to it without fear of consequence, like for example changing the physical and chemical properties of the atmosphere. The fact that this inevitably rebounds on us (the perpetrator) as pollution, acid rain and global warming simply indicates that we are not separate from it in the first place. (Q35)

He continues by mourning the ubiquity of this faulty view and warns of catastrophic consequences:

Unfortunately when we look around the world today we can only conclude that our Western worldview has reinforced a belief in this deluded view that we really are separate. Environmental degradation is occurring on a scale never before witnessed in human history. When we look at the larger picture of geological time, there may have been eco-catastrophes in the past that drove species to extinction (e.g. meteor impacts), but never before has this been done by one species to other species and potentially to their own! (Q35)

To understand why the view of separation has become so dominant in the world requires an examination of the underlying causes. Quinn provides two strands of explanation, one with Western origins and the other based on the inescapable humanness of all people.

6.7.3 Western Origins of Erroneous Views

Western worldviews have eroded much of indigenous beliefs around the world and their influence continues to grow with globalisation. Unfortunately, there are several problematic foundations of Western worldviews according to Quinn. These are: 1) Christianity, 2) Materialism and atomism, and 3) Psychology and psychotherapy.

Quinn sees Christianity as responsible for both a fixed view of self and one that is separated from everything else. Christianity teaches that “the separate self with the soul lasts forever and goes to heaven or goes to hell” (Q17). This implies that the self is a permanent, isolated entity within the body. It is impervious to change but merely moves from one realm of existence to another. Christianity also claims that we are born with sin on our soul and Jesus died on the cross to save us (Q8, Q16). This implies helplessness because, as Quinn points out, “You can’t save yourself” (Q16 - stress in original).

13 Though this passage emphasises the ‘Western worldview’ (the article was written specifically for Western audience), it probably applies to many other non-Western worldviews as well; that is to say, the global human outlook is dominated by a view of self as separate and independent. This is why social isolationism and environmental degradation is not just a Western phenomenon.
Therefore you are fixed, powerless and at the mercy of divine intervention. A fixed view of self and the world is the only possible consequence. For Quinn, these teachings that give rise to a model of human beings based on dependency rather than capacity are extremely sombre.

Secondly, Quinn argues that both materialist philosophy and atomism are embedded within and strengthen the already powerful force of Christianity (Q17, Q35). Both materialism and atomism (the latter epitomised by Newtonian physics) establish the notion that everything is simply composed of “building blocks”. This contrasts markedly with ecology and modern physics that both refute the view of the world as static and discrete. Ecology informs us that “nothing exists independently of anything else” while modern physics states that the world is “just a constant, dynamic, interactive flux of energy and matter” (Q38).

Lastly, Quinn, borrowing from the book *Thought without a Thinker* by Epstein, believes that Western psychology also reinforces flawed views of self (Q17-18). Rather than revealing the true nature of self, psychology is mainly concerned with reinforcing a particular identity of self. Thus, psychology is no different to Christianity because it supports a fixed theory of self. Since psychological treatment is the only healing method in modern medicine, psychology has a considerable impact by institutionalising this view.

### 6.7.4 Buddhist Explanation and Human Self-Consciousness

Although the influence of Western worldviews is significant, Quinn is quick to point out that these mistaken views of self arise from an even more fundamental root: our humanness. On the position that the self is real, he draws on the three characteristics of existence especially *anatta*. *Anatta* is usually translated as non-self but Quinn uses the more explanatory term ‘insubstantiality’ (Q43):

> It [insubstantiality] means that in so far as no thing (nothing) or phenomenon can exist independently of anything else it has no separate, unchanging, inherent quality. Nothing is discrete in the sense of having an independently existing, self-subsistent, inner essence. Everything ... arises in dependence on a network of interconnected conditions. When these conditions cease the phenomenon ceases. It is all a process in space, if you like. (Q43)

It then follows that:

> ... human beings are no different; they do not have a permanent, everlasting ‘soul’ at the core of their being. They are simply an impermanent and insubstantial flux of mental and physical conditions arising and ceasing. Self-conscious awareness of these processes (which is also a process) deludes us into thinking we have some permanent essence at the centre of our being. (Q44)
By refuting the existence of the soul, Quinn’s Buddhist position is diametrically opposed to Christianity, or any belief founded on substantiality. The self is not real in that it is dependent on other conditions and continuously changes as they change. The sense of being real, separate or fixed is a deluded concoction of the mind. The question that arises is how this deluded sense of self came about in the first place. Quinn’s explanation is based on the unique ability of human beings to be aware of themselves:

The human mind is unique in that it has self-consciousness. This sets us apart from the other animals. Whilst the other animals are generally speaking simply aware through their senses and driven by their instincts we have what philosophers and psychologists refer to as ‘reflexive’ consciousness. If you look the word ‘reflexive’ up in a dictionary you’ll find it means to bend back on itself. In other words, we are not simply aware through the senses we are aware that we are aware. The mind bends back on itself and can look into itself. Because we are aware of something being aware we have consciousness of a self. We are taught to label this ‘something being aware’ as the ‘self’ or ‘I’ from an early age. (Q34)

To restate the proposition, “awareness of something being aware produces our experience of self-hood” (Q49). The thinking process further reinforces this sense of self-hood:

Whenever we think, our minds retreat inwardly in a sort of self-referencing arc. We can close our eyes and consciously think about ourselves or analyse ourselves. We can look back into our memories and construct a sense of our past, or we can imagine ourselves in some future situation (try it). This is often called ‘reflection’, another word that shares its meaning with reflexive. (Q49)

He concludes that because self-reflexivity is such a continuous process it creates a strong – and unique - sense of self for each human being:

Actually, our mind is doing this bending back on itself or referring back to itself all the time. You could describe it as a process of self-referencing. This self-referential process is happening continuously and very fast so that it is largely unconscious. We're not aware that we're doing it (unlike when we're consciously reflecting). We're continually remembering our self, imagining our self, thinking about our self, generating feelings about our self, forming attitudes toward our self, and so on. That is why we have expressions like ‘positive or negative self-image’ or ‘low self-esteem’. They refer to personal experiences produced by these self-referencing arcs within our own minds. (Q49)

This paragraph conveys the idea that we are forming images of ourselves all the time – a dynamic and shifting process. Hence our self-conceptualisation is always changing. We sometime view ourselves positive but at times are less flattering. Self-esteem is sometime high but many times we feel down. We don’t view ourselves the same as we did when we were children – our childhood were the innocent days but understanding was limited and crude. Therefore, even at this level we are not fixed since our self-image is constantly alternating as new information accrue – or sometime without any apparent reason. Yet through the many cycles of change, the feeling of ‘I am the same person as before’ remains. One important factor is the way we define ourselves using externalities (Q48). These externalities may be concrete such as possessions, clothes, friends, family and job while others may be less tangible such
as education, status, roles or even sense of place. Nevertheless, they are bountiful, feel real and are ‘constant’ at least for a period of time. Quinn describes how we create our identity with externalities:

... we use their qualities or characteristics to distinguish us from others, to set ourselves apart. Creating our identity also involves actively ‘identifying’ with these things; that is, equating our ‘self’ with their qualities. To put it simply, we use these external relations to give our self an identity, and then ‘identifying’ with the identity becomes a powerful way of creating and maintaining that sense of self. (Q48)

Quinn argues that we are necessarily externally oriented because we need the external to create the self. The continual construction of self is enmeshed in the things we acquire physically and mentally and the things that surround us. Without our friends, our jobs, our possession and especially our knowledge, who would we be? Yet even knowledge is knowledge of the external. Knowledge of the internal is extremely limited for most people. This is because we have been trained to see the external as more substantial but the internal is rarely discussed. In fact, Quinn argues that Western cultures have shunned looking inward, at one point in history dismissing it as navel-gazing (Q19). The British coined the term ‘navel-gazing’ when they went to India and found Indians meditating. Even today, some of Quinn’s students still believe that meditation is associated with the Devil (Q18). Such naivety is symptomatic of a culture steep in neglect, even fearful, of the inner world. As Quinn puts it, “Western people are not at home in themselves. They’re ill at ease with entering within. It’s unfamiliar territory and therefore frightening” (Q18). The result is that “we are overwhelmingly externally oriented in a utilitarian relationship with the world” (Q18). This is witnessed by increasing materialism, aggression and selfishness in society. If we neglect the inner world the outer world suffers. Rather than being in harmony with the outer world, we manipulate it, all out of the need to reinforce our image of self however flawed or fleeting. According to Buddhism, this deluded thinking is the result of the belief in self as real and separate.

Unfortunately, as Quinn writes, the predisposition that assumes delusion as truth is innate in us. He uses the term ‘hard-wired’ in the following passage to describe the contributing physiology but elsewhere to mean the inescapable human condition (see Q36):

For example, at the physiological level, we have two eyes at the front of our heads and so binocular vision is ‘hard-wired’ into us and as a result we can see three dimensionally. Through socialisation we are taught to label and thus separate things with names like ‘me’, ‘you’, ‘table’, ‘chair’, and so on.

The end result is that we perceive a world of seemingly separate phenomena spread out in space. We perceive ourselves as one object separate and apart from all the others. Furthermore we ‘essentialise’ things - we attribute permanent essences or a sense of solidity to the perceived phenomena. Finally, subjectively, we prefer certain things to others. Some give rise to pleasant sensations when we
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perceive them, others unpleasant repulsion, and others still neutral feelings. (Q42-Q43)

Quite simply, our belief in separation gives rise to a propensity to gravitate to one thing or another. If we were to feel truly interconnected – in tune with reality – then this would not happen. The truth is nothing exists independently. At the biological level we depend on nature services to keep us alive. At the social level we depend on family and friends for “psychological nourishment” and even to shape our identity (Q34). Ultimately, the world and cosmos is an interlinked chain of events of matter and energy:

... every single phenomenon in the universe has evolved through a gigantic network of causes and conditions. Everything we encounter is but a temporary perturbation of energy and matter in a vast web of interconnected conditions stretched out infinitely over time and space. One phenomena [sic] depends for its existence on the properties of another phenomena. Everything we encounter can be analysed and reduced to the conditions that produce it, spread out over space and time. (Q50)

It is in this sense that Quinn concludes:

... we do not exist as we think we do, that is, we are not a completely independent existing self. In fact the implication is that we, as we normally think of our selves, do not ultimately exist! (Q50)

Existence is interdependence. Separation is fallacy – a fabrication of the mind.

6.7.5 Buddhism’s Optimism

Despite the flaws of human beings, Buddhism also sees great potential. Ironically, it is our ability to be aware of ourselves, our self-consciousness, that gives us unrivalled powers:

Self-consciousness allows us many advantages and creative potential. With it we have a sense of autonomy and can make choices and engage in purposeful behaviour to ensure our survival. We can make and build things and pass this knowledge on. We can reason, remember and imagine and all of these abilities come from the mind being able to look into itself. (Q34)

Despite its dangers, self-consciousness holds the key to our potential. This potential is immense, indeed unlimited, because, more than being able to do good, we can transcend ordinary existence (Q38). Thus, to be human is a great opportunity and differentiates us from other animals. Quinn contrasts Buddhism and its optimism with Catholicism castigating the latter as utterly debilitating. He recounts a story of a student in an Asian religious studies class he was teaching. The aim of the class was for students to study a belief system different from their own in order provide relief to their Western values. However, one particular student would have none of it insisting to present her paper on Christianity:

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14 This occurs only in the interview and not in the newspaper articles intended for the general public.
So we would ask the students to present papers at the tutorials and one little Australian Chinese girl came to me and said she wanted to give her paper on Jesus Christ – she was a born-again Christian. The whole point of the course was that you’re be better off doing something on Buddhism or Daoism to look at different value systems to yours. So I encouraged her to do that. But on the day she came to give her paper in the tutorial and the first thing she said was, “Jesus Christ died on the cross to save us,” and all the kids immediately looked at the floor. And then a Malaysian Chinese girl, about the same age, just interrupted her straight away and said in that sort of guttural Malaysian style, “Why someone have to die on the cross to save you? Why you can’t save yourself?” And I was going “Oh ...” That was fantastic. (Q8)

For Quinn, the story seems to illustrate the power of a religious belief to enforce the view of self as fixed, incapacitated and irredeemable. But for someone who has not been exposed before like the Malaysian girl this seems entirely illogical. Quinn believes that even those without a dogmatic Catholic upbringing are not immune to this sense of self because it is so axiomatic in the West (Q8). He believes Western people cannot escape the power of their culture which contains basic assumptions mainly derived from Christianity. It becomes a conditioning that buries itself deep into their subconscious.

In contrast, not only is Buddhism more optimistic about human potential it is also more forgiving. Buddhism is about making the effort rather than dwelling in failures of the past. In this area, Sangharakshita has been influential in Quinn’s change of attitude, “a breakthrough” in his words, towards practice:

This statement where he [Sangharakshita] says, “You’re going to fail 10 times, 20 times, 100 times, 1000 times. That’s not important; making the effort is what’s important” ... Til that force of inertia, that backward pulling sense of conditioning in us, is finally broken which occurs at the stage of stream entry. And the change there is permanent, the basic rule he has taught is that every time you stop making effort you go backward. That has been a major important teaching for me. If I am failing – you know how I would call failing in the old fashion way – if I look at why it is simply because I am not practicing Buddhism any more. I’ve stopped making the effort. (Q24)

As a result of the emphasis on ‘making the effort’, Quinn believes that the chance of self-condemnation and guilt is significantly lessened. After all, human beings are doomed to make mistake, fall prey to desire or follow deluded thinking – these tendencies are ‘hard-wired’ in us – and yet we have the capacity to recover, surmount these obstacles and achieve transformation. As long as we make genuine effort, that is enough; it is the only thing we can do. The self-consciousness that creates motivation for what is noble is our salvation. Quinn quotes a verse that again illustrates the idea:

No matter how far you swim out in the bitter sea,
You can always return to the beach.
Put down the killing knife! (Q20-21, Q37)

15 Stream entry is the first stage of enlightenment in Buddhism. It is especially prominent in Theravada Buddhism.
‘Put down the killing knife’ means to stop the unskilful action you are doing and return to the dharma. In Buddhist history, even a serial murderer during the time of the Buddha gave up what he was doing, practiced dharma and soon became enlightened (Q17). He was able to attain the ultimate human potential within a short period of time. For Quinn, this idea of unlimited human potential embedded within a compassionate, forgiving path had an immense impact on his thinking. Far from a path of despair, guilt and shame Buddhism provided an optimistic paradigm for living. Given his past, this was something he never imagined.

### 6.7.6 Conclusion: Quinn’s Paradigm Shifts

To sum up, Buddhism caused a twofold paradigm shift in Quinn, a radical change in two fundamental worldviews. Firstly, the shift is from a view of self as fixed, separate and real to one as fluid, interdependent and insubstantial. This insight has been gained from the study of Buddhist theories and distilled through reflection, teaching and writing. It has also been achieved through meditation - the practice of looking inward and exploring the inner world - where he discovered the transparency of self and its lack of solidity (Q19, Q53). In relating back to past experiences especially his childhood, Quinn has grasped the destructiveness of his former misguided view and the part it has played in human depravation. Fortunately, accompanying this has been the recognition that all misguided views are just “mental phenomena” – that is, they have no inherent reality (Q11, Q16, Q17 and Q51). Hence whenever any of these appear, and they still do occasionally because of the depth of conditioning, Quinn can choose not to give them any attention or use one of the antidotes at his disposal. In this way, misguided views have no power over him (Q30, Q32).

Secondly, Quinn has discarded Catholicism’s cynicism in favour of Buddhism’s optimism. What delighted him was the Buddhist position on the unlimited potential of human beings and the idea of making mistakes and then continuing without guilt. This emotional shift should not be underestimated and is as important as the change in view of self. This is because optimism inspires confidence and confidence makes us go forward whereas negativity makes us sink. Hence optimism is the driving force for positive change. Yet the Buddhist sense of optimism is grounded in the idea of non-self and interdependence. This is a far cry from the exuberance and will to conquer nature that characterise much of the modern world. However, that worldview based on separation is being exposed as myth with every passing day. Soon human society will have to choose a new paradigm for living. Fortunately, Quinn has already found one and he has never been happier (Q31).
6.8 Kacy

Kacy’s paradigm shift came with a very human touch. It occurred during the Dalai Lama’s tour of Australia, and it was as unexpected as it was sudden. It also converted her to Buddhism and changed her way of living and working. Section 6.8.1 begins the story by recounting how Kacy met the Dalai Lama and how that encounter caused a seismic paradigm shift felt physically to the core of her body. It describes how that shift was not a shift in any worldview in particular but a realisation of the possibilities of human existence. Section 6.8.1 also elaborates on how the idea of compassion, a key component of Tibetan Buddhism, was introduced to her in the most compelling way. Section 6.8.2 demonstrates how the impact of this paradigm shift made its way into Kacy’s business practice. In particular, it presents the Ten Enlightened Business Principles she adopted in order to actualise Buddhist ideals in her business. Section 6.8.3 concludes by providing a summary of Kacy’s paradigmatic experience.

6.8.1 Optimism, Possibilities and Compassion

The moment of truth came swiftly and suddenly. Kacy had been busy. The Dalai Lama was coming and she was responsible for handling the media. She was not a Buddhist and was in an unfamiliar territory where the dharma dominated. She had known about the Dalai Lama as the charismatic spiritual leader of Tibet but a personal meeting had never been on the agenda. All that would change on a day in May 1992 along with her whole life. This is how events transpired in her own words:

Incredulously, Kacy burst into tears purely on sight of the Dalai Lama walking into the room. The intense feeling – something she explained as “a recognition” and “a connection” – continued over the next several days of the visit. In fact, just by being around him made the whole committee “dharma high” – a heighten state of elation that she compared to being on drugs (K2). Things were hectic but by
the time the visit was coming to an end Kacy made a brave request for a personal audience on behalf of the committee. She got an affirmative reply and everyone gathered in a room just before he was about to leave. She remembered fondly the half-and-hour that ensued because the Dalai Lama was very informal and congenial. In fact, much of the time he spent making jokes, laughing, teasing and the rest saying goodbye. However, he did manage to give about seven minutes of talk on what it meant to be an Australian Buddhist and those words held great meaning for her life in a new faith (K2-K3).

When the Dalai Lama arrived at the airport, Kacy recalls a touching episode involving his bodyguards. Two Australian police officers had been assigned to guard him all the time. As he was about to leave, he thanked them and began the ritual of saying goodbye. However, Kacy was amazed by their reaction: what were once sturdy, professional men had been reduced to sobbing souls:

[These were] [t]ough guys and then they’re crying! And you know how he’d present the scarf to say goodbye in the Tibetan tradition and these cops they’ve got their guns here and everything but with tears running down their face. Like even for them, they were so struck by his humanity. (K3)

As much as the police officers were struck by the Dalai Lama’s humanity, Kacy was even more so – and it was an immense feeling. She describes her experience with him from the moment she saw him as “metaphysical” and extraordinary, and unimaginable because of her strong scientific training (K3). The feeling was not intellectual but rather “a whole feeling within my body” (K3). She compares it to something a child might experience living fully with all the senses alive – something beyond words can convey. More importantly, it contained “an absolute certainty” of what could be realised. It was a shift in knowing, a shift in understanding, a shift in paradigm. In her own words, this is what that shift meant:

... because I had met His Holiness I was convinced that there were more people like him on the planet – he wasn’t the only one but he was one, a very important one – and because there were people like him on the planet both now, the past and future times, all things were possible ... By what I meant by all things are possible is that we can live in peace, we can look after the environment, that we can be compassionate and we can move beyond harming others. It was the strongest feeling because I felt that there’s this person and there’s an explanation for it. (Z3)

The possibilities the Dalai Lama had brought had never occurred to her before and it opened the door to the deep longing for a better world. Hope had been unleashed in the mightiest of ways. The feeling would last for about five more months and then linger on until this day albeit in an intellectual sense.

Compassion

What was it that Kacy saw in the Dalai Lama that was so inspirational? In one word: compassion. In fact, Kacy had had a prelude of this even before meeting the Dalai Lama. Dawa, the Australian monk
who had laughed at her earlier, had taken her to see a Vietnamese monk who they were inviting to receive the Dalai Lama (K15). Kacy and Dawa were honoured guests of the community and a lunch had been prepared for them. However, she was the only woman there and felt timid not knowing any protocol. Unexpectedly, an old friend of the Vietnamese monk had arrived having travelled a long way to visit. He was an old Tibetan monk and sure enough he joined the luncheon. After a while, laughter flowed as they began to share stories from the past. However, the subject took Kacy by surprise as she recalls in bewilderment:

And then the Vietnamese monk and the Tibetan monk started telling stories about the time they were in prison and being tortured, because the Vietnamese guy was in Lhasa, by the communist rebels at the time. And the Tibetan guy was locked up by the Chinese. But you know as they were telling the stories they were making jokes out of that. And they were picking themselves laughing, the two of them. And they were little wizened up people. They both ‘Zzzzzz’ [snickering in jest] and they were telling jokes about the time they were in prison and being tortured. And I was just sitting there. And I said in my little voice because I didn’t know what to say, “What did you think about when you were being tortured? How was it?” And the Vietnamese guy, he just looked at me and said, “You know, it was really hard. It was really, really hard! But I tried to practice compassion at every moment.” And I just went, “Ur, Ur, Ur ... ... [shocked amazement].” I then I went, “Ah well” in my heart. Because I had never met people like this before. And then that little moment was finished, and then they went back to telling jokes about being in prison and laughing. It just blew me away! I’d never met people like this you see. (K15)

This incredible story reverberated in her mind. Even during the interview, so many years after the incident, her disbelief of that encounter could still be felt. She had never encountered human beings that were so different, that filled their hearts with compassion even against all odds. It had touched her heart and had primed her to what was to come.

The Dalai Lama was the vindication. She had witnessed his every movement and had become engrossed in his grace. The Dalai Lama was no ordinary man. He was completely present with everyone he was with and they felt his attention:

... he was astounding in however he dealt with the people. It was like ... he was so present and for anyone whether it was the policeman who was protecting him or a little kid with some flowers or the Lord Mayor or whatever, he was the same. You know looking into their eyes ... it’s just amazing! (Z2)

As she sums up, it was this virtue that she admired greatly: “his ability to be totally with whomever he was with - absolutely and totally” (K11 – stress in original). Then, with that remarkable presence, he was able to extend compassion from his heart to theirs. That compassion was uncompromised and unconditioned given freely even to those considered his ‘enemies’. This resulted in “his entire life [being] spoken and acted in a non-violent fashion” (K11). When asked what being a Buddhist was
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about, the Dalai Lama simply tells people that it is about being kind – to everyone including oneself (K11). Kacy took this to heart.

6.8.2 Enlightened Business Ideals

The possibilities and compassion the Dalai Lama ushered was a momentous shift in paradigm. Kacy’s new mindset translated directly into her business ethics as illustrated when she was still working as the owner of a company. She had heard the Dalai Lama tell her that being a Western Buddhist was about dharma in practice and that meant working with people in communities rather than sticking to the ritualistic aspects (K3). That translated directly into her business life where the goal became to serve other people in the most ethical way (K8). To help put this into practice – a difficult task given economic necessities and an unsympathetic partner - she turned to the Ten Enlightened Business Principles formulated by Geshe Michael Roach, an American Tibetan monk who articulated them in his book, *The Diamond Cutter* (K35-36). These principles can be considered business approaches and ideals that run contrary to conventional thinking, although they clearly serve the well-being of all people. The following is her interpretation of ten principles and some indications of how she applied them in her business:

**Principle 1: Enhancing the well-being of others**

Kacy believes that this principle is about conducting business that is conducive to the well-being of the whole of society (K30). It is about the responsibility of business to contribute to social capital. This starts with taking care of employees and sub-contractors and looking for ways to enhance their lives. Principle 1 is also about examining the whole value chain of a business and ensuring that the business is not part of anything that contributes to environmental or social degradation (K30).

**Principle 2: Respect your financial commitments**

She interprets this principle to mean: “Pay your debt, don’t owe anyone, don’t use anyone, that kind of stuff” (K30). This principle is about financial soundness but, more than anything else, it is about taking care of others first. Therefore Kacy made sure that her employees were paid first before she was paid (K32-33, K35). Hence, Principle 2 is about taking responsibility for the lives of others.

**Principle 3: Act with absolute equanimity**

Kacy believes that this principle encourages the development of equanimity in employees to increase effectiveness and understanding within the organisation (K30). Equanimity allows a degree of detachment and allows people to see things from a wider perspective. This means people will be less trapped in their own thinking and conflict will be reduced, as Kacy explains:
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... usually the people you’re working with, their egos are very caught up in things. So when yours is too, the flames get higher and higher. And the idea is if you can maintain a bit of equanimity, you’ll be able to get a few wisdom in what’s going on and understand the whole thing. So you work best then. But it’s also the fact that being a little bit calmer, makes other people will be a bit calmer. (K30)

Hence, principle 3 is designed to foster peace and an environment of prudence. It prevents rashness and egotism in decision-making, a key to a successful business.

**Principle 4: Convey true impressions**

This principle is about “being very scrupulous about telling the truth” (K30). Kacy believes it covers the range of things from the blatant to the subtle. The blatant concerns not lying. The subtle can be anything that conveys false impressions, such as a sarcastic remark, because these can inflict damage on other people. So this principle teaches Kacy to pay careful attention to speech – always.

**Principle 5. Bring people together**

As someone with a social justice background this principle enshrines what Kacy’s work is about, as she explains:

> My work is supposed to be about that [bringing people together], the environmental work that I do. And it’s about continually trying to work to keep that kind of dialogue going, so that solutions can be looked up from a whole number of different ways.... Bring people together, yes, try ... and if there’s a situation where there’s a conflict or it’s difficult – things I hate the most – I have to try to work with that. (K30-31)

So for her, this principle is about cooperation, plurality and openness. This is further highlighted by her uneasiness with the notion of ‘expert’. She believes that being given the title ‘expert’ is a privilege and the status should be used wisely to ensure that other voices can be heard (K31).

**Principle 6. Speak professionally and respectfully**

This principle she believes is similar to principle 4. This is probably because of the breadth of her interpretation there (K31).

**Principle 7. Speak about meaningful things**

Kacy says that this principle is about reducing gossips and talk that cast people in a negative light (K31). It is about not perpetuating idle talk that can be counterproductive in a business. Rather, Principle 7 espouses the idea of having silent periods when words are unnecessary.
Principle 8. Find happiness in what you have
Kacy describes Principle 8 as being based on the Buddhist idea of contentment. Contentment is about being happy with the situation now rather than wanting something else (K31). For Kacy, the principle reminds her not to be acquisitive and to appreciate what she has:

... it’s more about expressing gratitude for what you have: the moment, the health, the fact that I can do this, that I’ve had this education, that I’m in this position to be able to do something, that kind of thing. (K31)

Principle 9. Celebrate others’ achievements
Kacy relates this principle with Principle 8 because being happy with what you have also implies not being jealous of others (K31). When one is jealous of others then one cannot be happy for them. However, Kacy has found that celebrating others’ achievement is not easy because negative thoughts, such as a harmful wish for them, sometimes creep in (K33-K34). Nevertheless, she tries her best with the aid of meditation.

Principle 10. See the hidden potential of all things
This principle concerns “opening yourself up” to the potential of all things that can happen (K31). She explains that often we have preconceived notions of what is good or what we want and, when things turn out differently, we reject what we are given. Thus, Principle 10 is about being patient to the possibilities that all things have potentials even if they might seem negative at first. To illustrate, she points to a Tibetan parable:

There was this lama who had a family. One day his horse escaped and it was his only horse, and his friends said, “How terrible! How are you going to plough the field? This is a terrible, terrible thing.” And he said, “Could be good and could be bad.” The next day the horse comes back and has four other horses with him. Next thing his only son falls of the roof and breaks his leg and the friends say, “How terrible, what a terrible, terrible thing.” But again he says, “Could be good and could be bad.” But what happened was, the next day the emperor’s generals came around and conscripted every young man in the village to go off and fight in a war. So because his son had a broken leg, didn’t get to go. So it’s like that kind of paradigm, about seeing the hidden things. (K31)

Kacy uses the parable to explain the idea that something that seems bad may actually turn out to be good, that is to say, the hidden potential of all situations. Another point she makes concerns the idea that what you make of a situation determines whether it is positive or negative:

It’s also about not just immediately judging something to be good or bad, right or wrong, because [it is, rather,] what you do with the situation ... it is like one of my teacher said, “Buddhism is all about things happens, and how you deal with them.” (K31 – stress added).
The situation itself is inherently meaningless or “empty” as Kacy puts it. For her, “How we deal with it is the trick in terms of what it opens up” (K31). Nothing is inherently good or bad; it depends what you make of it.

Kacy emphasises that all ten business principles are related and they should be adhered to as a group. For many years, she applied them in her business and constantly reminded herself of them in whatever she did (K32). The result was a gradual shift from a growth-oriented philosophy for the company to one of social responsibility. She also realises that the original growth philosophy had been about stroking her ego:

Yes because it [growth] made me feel good about myself. The more jobs you had on the white board, the busier you were - and you see this all throughout society – therefore the more admirable you are, the more worthy you are. (K25)

In other words, a hidden desire to feel important, to feel worthy, was the driver behind Kacy’s business approach rather than a genuine commitment to what she was doing. She believes this to be the case for most business people and a cause of many ethical problems in society. So her attitude began to change significantly:

Rather than “I’m making a difference”, it’s more about “I’m making the difference.” (Z26 – stress in original)

And,

... from, “We’ve got all these amazing jobs, aren’t we clever” to “We’ve got these jobs coming in, good, that mean I can pay my staff and pay their family.” (Z25)

So Kacy’s shift is from individualism to living consciously within society and for society. Unfortunately, the change did not resonate well with her business partner whose stance was “bigger, better and more” (Z24). After two years of argument, Kacy finally took her share of the money and quit. She moved to a quiet town on the coast and now works part-time locally and earns considerable less than before.

6.8.3 Conclusion

Kacy’s world changed forever on that fateful day the Dalai Lama arrived. She had never seen anyone like him before. His presence and uncanny compassion stole her heart. The realisation that such a human being existed – a “super human being” with the most humane nature – amazed her (K11). It was a paradigm shift of the possibilities of human existence. And it rippled. From that day on, her business practice, a clear example of the Dalai Lama’s impact, began to take on an ethical dimension. She adopted the ten principles of Michael Roach that constitute a business paradigm radically different to
conventional growth approaches, and for many years worked hard at doing business according to these ideals. Business became more about service than money or ego development.

The Dalai Lama also made her understand that living was much more than about being busy, earning money and the likes:

... all of this striving is useless. You know, it just fills up the time. It’s like a way of avoiding being alive. You think you're being alive because you're having all your adrenalin running, and you’ve got this meeting, this deadline and all of that, but while you’re doing all of that you’re not listening to the rain coming down, talking to another person ...” (K25)

For her, living has become about being present, being compassionate in a suffering world and practicing the dharma. It has led her to semi-retirement at the age of just over fifty. She now lives simply, locally and most importantly happily, among friends and nature. The Buddhism embodied in the living Dalai Lama shifted her paradigm and changed her life irreversibly.

6.9 Rae

Throughout the interview Rae portrayed himself as a simple man living a simple life. He is modest, he is frugal and he does not do much. However, his paradigmatic story is astonishing, perhaps the most remarkable of all the participants. Rae’s story is the story of the deepest transformation in Buddhism – how Rae managed to transcend mundane existence as he moves on a path towards enlightenment. The sections below detail the events together with an analysis of what took place derived from passages in the interview and in the books he wrote. Section 6.9.1 provides the background by recalling a preliminary experience of how Rae was able to observe anger in a detached manner without having been taught the practice. Section 6.9.2 describes his attainment of sotapanna, the first stage of enlightenment. In particular, it examines what took place, the paradigm shift involved and events that transpired as a result. Section 6.9.3 focuses on his fundamental belief that the world is empty and devoid of any inherent meaning. Section 6.9.4 provides a summary of Rae’s paradigmatic insights.

6.9.1 Preliminary Experience

According to Rae, he is an ordinary man teaching at a university and living a very ordinary life with his family (R23-R25). He asserts that this has always been the case. When he began to study Buddhism, many things began to reveal themselves to him. However, even before Rae learnt the practice of doo chit (literary translated as ‘mind observation’) he had experienced an episode where he was able to see the characteristic of an emotion that invaded his mind. The emotion was anger and it showed its face in detail giving him insight on how to deal with it:
There was a time I noticed that when anger arises it arises very quickly ... a sudden ‘whoosh’ would quickly turn into anger, but when anger ceased it faded away only slowly until it would suddenly disappear. So I saw the nature of anger in the mind like that. When I saw that, anger would be much more subdued than before. As a result of seeing anger arising and ceasing I would hardly ever get angry with anybody - only just minor irritation and frustration but not anger that would result in temper and harsh speech. (R3)

The first thing to notice in this passage is that it is a description of anger from beginning to end, that is to say, Rae saw how anger arose and how it ceased. He compares anger to a flame flaring up on being lit and then flickering smaller and smaller until it is extinguished (R4). The second point is that when he understood the nature of anger it became much more subdued turning into “minor irritation and frustration”, that is to say, observation of anger lessened its impact. Unbeknown to him, the kind of observation he had achieved was the heart of *doo chit* Asoke would teach him although it is not clear why this event occurred. Perhaps it was chance, perhaps it had been instinctual or perhaps he had learnt it during a previous life - there was no way of telling. In any case, it occurred only once (R4) and, though vivid, did not change his life. So he continued his duties as usual.

### 6.9.2 Sotapanna: Taste of Freedom

The breakthrough came unexpectedly. Rae had been practicing *doo chit* for a few years. He had been as patient as ever observing things as they came up whenever time allowed. What happened next is difficult to conceptualise but it can be described as anything from an existential paradigm shift to a transcendence of mundane existence, or in Buddhist terminology, attainment of the first stage of enlightenment. The following passage is Rae’s description of the events that took place:

... one day I was waiting for my wife to take her home. I had just gone to a meeting because I was a member of committee for academic standards and so I’d just had a meeting. That afternoon, I came back to teach a class and I was tired by the evening. So I was sitting there resting and waiting. As soon as I sat down I closed my eyes and tried to rest. I was not thinking about practice at all. But suddenly words sprang to my mind, a rhetorical statement, “The feeling of self...” because back then while I was practicing I would have the feeling of selfhood quite often that ‘I’ was doing this and that or ‘I’ was this and that. Then the words came out: “You don’t need to destroy the feeling of selfhood. All you have to do is destroy the wrong view of self and *sotapanna* can be attained.” That’s what my mind was saying. Then suddenly the mind became one ... whoop! ... and achieved a state that I’d never encountered before. After it became one only a little while it came back out, and there was a retrospection which led to an understanding: “This is the state of nirvana. It’s the mind that only knows nirvana and doesn’t go and taste any other states of greed, hate and delusion. It will only experience the state of nirvana.” That’s what the mind was expressing. “Practice is just this. It is about cultivating *sati*. Everything else is not the path. The only path is cultivating *sati*. There are still many defilements
that I have to rid myself and there’s a lot of work left.” So I was able to contemplate these main aspects. (R7)

This is a detailed passage that needs explaining. Firstly, Rae was waiting for his wife to take her home as he often did. So the occasion was very ordinary, something people do everyday. The only difference was that although he was tired, tiredness did not prevent him from continuing practice.

Secondly, he was not trying to do anything special when the mind spoke to him. What the mind was telling him concerned the idea of self. Rae, like most people, had always felt a strong sense of self: whatever he did the presence of ‘I’ dominated. This notion is described in his book as he asks the readers to explore:

Do you ever feel that ... the body is me ... the mind is me?
Do you ever feel ... the body is mine ... the mind is mine?
Do you ever feel that ... you are the owner of your body and your mind?
And do you ever feel that you are the owner of this object and that object?
(Rae 2005, page 3)

The answer is of course ‘Yes’ and he goes on to emphasise the feeling of ‘I’ in all of our actions:

I love, I hope for, I desire, I hate this thing and that thing.
I love, I worry about, I wish, I like, I hate this person and that person.
(Rae 2005, page 3)

Rae felt the ‘I’ in just the same way (R24). Thus, it was ‘Rae’ who was the lecturer at university and who taught students; it was ‘Rae’ who was the father of a son and who cared for him; it was ‘Rae’ who woke up, drove to work, ate, watched television and then slept. ‘Rae’ as an inseparable feeling of self was always up to something and never went away. However, the Buddhism he had learnt taught him that there was no real self and that practice was about techniques that tried to achieve the non-self. Hence, practice included studying, analysing, sitting meditation, walking meditation and so on but whatever it was the idea was the same: to coerce the mind to change (R4-R5, R6). Simply put, practice was about doing things to the mind in order to eradicate the sense of self. However, it has to be said that this is a predominant view among Thai Buddhists and one Rae himself had adopted earlier on. Unfortunately, it had failed him miserably. The practice of doo chit was different because it emphasised unadulterated observation. All he needed to do was observe the mind\textsuperscript{17} and then things would take care of themselves, as he describes in another book:

Do you believe that just observing can lead to clarity?

\textsuperscript{16} The name of the book is not given to protect the identity of Rae. This applies to all quotes from his books. Translation from Thai is by the researcher.

\textsuperscript{17} Although doo chit literary translates as ‘observe the mind’, the body is not neglected as Rae makes this clear in his books. Observation of body that comes with its awareness automatically occurs during practice. However, the emphasis when starting out is on the mind.
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If somebody told you ... there’s nothing difficult you have to do; just observe and clarity will emerge.

What do you think? Do you believe?

It’s hard to believe. Hard because we’re used to thinking that achieving clarity is not something easy. You have to sweat blood and tears. You have to keep the precepts. You have to meditate. You have to do vipassana.

But if suddenly somebody told you that you don’t have to do anything difficult. Just observe and clarity will come. Who would believe? (Rae 2005b, page 5)

According to Rae, doo chit was simplicity itself. All one needed to do – in fact, all that one should do – was observe. Contrary to the traditional approach, practice was about seeing, not doing.

It is in this context that the interview passage should be understood. When the words “You don’t need to destroy the feeling of selfhood” came to his mind, it was about not doing. When they were followed by “All you have to do is destroy the wrong view of self” it meant just seeing. Destroying the wrong view of self is just a different way of seeing. And what is the right way of seeing? It is to see the true nature of existence. It is to see the reality of all things. Rae elaborates:

You might be able to see that all things are in permanent flux. They come into being. They persist. Finally they fade and disappear.

If you observe with awareness a little more, ask yourself whether all things outside us, within us, our body, our mind and our many feelings ... can these be controlled as we wish?

You will see that these things cannot be forced in the way we want. For example, if you have a headache, try telling it to disappear immediately. Nothing will happen and the only way to make it go away is to take painkillers. You can't force things. Or if you’re feeling sad or worried, try telling it, “Sadness and worry please go away now!” Again, nothing will happen. If you want sadness to go away then you have to go and do something else until the mind forgets what was troubling it in the first place.

This is the truth of all things. (Rae 2004, page 30)

Rae is describing reality as the characteristics of existence notably impermanence and insubstantiality (suffering comes later). This is indeed what he had nonchalantly witnessed when anger appeared for the first time, lingered and then vanished. Anger is an exemplar of not only mental objects but also all things in the world. That is to say, they come into being, persist and disappear. His mind then told him that “sotapanna can be attained” if he truly understood this reality. Sotapanna is the first stage of enlightenment in Theravada Buddhism and is the essential stepping-stone to nirvana or full

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18 In fact, the word ‘destroy’ seems somewhat harsh or inappropriate. I believe that he used it for convenience in conversation usage. It does not appear anywhere in his written works.
enlightenment, the fourth stage. These things the mind told him in a flash of wisdom accumulated from several years of practice.

Thirdly, the experience accompanying the attainment of \textit{sotapanna} had a transformative impact but was very short-lived.\(^1\) Rae does not remember much detail only that this happened:

\begin{quote}
It was like the mind suddenly at that point ‘whooped’ down and then it brightened again inside, something like that ... like I was in another world or another dimension, another state of existence that was not normal or as we usually are. Then it emerged back up. That was it - very short, not long time at all. (R8)
\end{quote}

Somehow he realised that this was the state of nirvana where the mind merely exists unperturbed by anything whatsoever. This is the ‘clarity’ he wrote about in his book (published after the experience and after confirmation by his teacher). Though the experience was short, his life for the next two weeks changed dramatically as recalls:

\begin{quote}
Then after the episode my mind began to change. It was very peaceful and still for about two weeks. Unbelievably, there were no defilements at all, like lust just completely disappeared from life. I felt that it was a life that was incredibly happy - there was no suffering at all. It didn’t matter what happened to me, anything at all, I was totally at peace. It lasted about two weeks and then things began to get back to what it was before ... like a normal person again and I began to feel this and that and so on. (R8)
\end{quote}

It is important to emphasise that during that time he did not experience any defilement. Not a trace of desire, greed, lust, anger, delusion or ill will. This is an exceptionally pure mind, at peace with everything. He felt “incredibly happy” although the word ‘happy’ is taken to mean lack of suffering rather than the conventional kind of happiness. Existence was extraordinary in the truest sense. Perhaps it can be said that during that time he was just \textit{being} – nothing more.

Lastly, the mind told him that \textit{doo chit} was the correct and only way for him: “Practice is just this. It’s about cultivating \textit{sati}. Everything else is not the path.” \textit{Sati} is, of course, awareness or mindfulness in order to make possible observation. It is the cornerstone of \textit{doo chit}. In the ensuing two weeks, Rae experienced the most heightened state of awareness as he explains in this passage:

\begin{quote}
Rae: ... The \textit{sati} was very sharp and very solid. It would not get caught up in emotions or anything.

Interviewer: If anything came in what would it \textit{[sati]} do?

Rae: It would know and be equanimous immediately. It would not go and grasp it or mess with it. It was very quick. And as for self-awareness ... normally I
\end{quote}

\(^{19}\) It is difficult to prove the attainment of \textit{sotapanna}. However, Rae is certain of it having been substantiated by his teacher. The deep transformation that followed also lends credibility.
would often lose myself by not being mindful or I would be daydreaming all the time, that was all gone. (R9)

_Sati_ acted as a guardian preventing mental arising from disturbing his mind. It occurred at a high frequency so that he was not lost in thought. It kept his mind untainted. However, the mind had also added that all was not finished. He had not attained nirvana and there was still work to do. This seemed to goad him to practice even harder, to dedicate his life completely to the task.

6.9.3 Empty World

The two weeks gave him a taste of freedom. It also gave him an understanding that all worldly things are empty of meaning. For example, the lure of women failed to ignite even the slightest passion:

... like if I saw a beautiful woman I wouldn’t feel anything. I saw it as just the way things are – just normal. (R8)

Nor was anyone able to illicit even a flicker in his mind no matter what they did:

If somebody came and said something or if during work something negative happened - before frustration would set in or I’d be annoyed or displeased - but back then I wouldn’t react to any of these things. Just look at it as normality. Just continued working as if nothing had happened. Whether other people agreed or not I didn’t react negatively or positively. I just did my duty. (R8-R9)

It is worthwhile to note the terms ‘normal’ and ‘normality’. They signify things as they are uncoloured by human meanings. A beautiful woman is only beautiful because human society deems it so. Likewise anything considered negative or positive said or done. There is no inherent truth stating that anything should be beautiful or ugly, positive or negative. Things just are, empty that is. Rae saw this naturally in everything he did and hence nothing could perturb him.

During those two weeks the idea of emptiness became so lucid that it re-oriented his view of purpose. Before practicing dharma, he was like everybody else: he wanted a good job, wealth, reputation and so on (R11). Things became clearer when he experienced the different forms of suffering (as described in Section 5.3.9) but _sotapanna_ finally cast away his worldly ambitions and focused his desire on practice:

... once I tasted it [_sotapanna_] I understood that there’s nothing better to do than this. The worldly things really they’re just nonsensical ... really nonsensical. Things like wealth, prestige, praise - I really don’t care for them at all. It’s just no fun any more. It’s much more interesting to practice _doo chit_, to observe things that arise in the mind. My enjoyment lies there - this is called _chanda_. _Chanda_ does not lie in my work anymore or in worldly things. Those worldly things ... if I have them OK and if I don’t have them that’s OK too. (R10-11)

_Chanda_ is the desire and diligence for true well-being. It is based on wisdom and is the opposite of _tanha_, the desire for pleasure based on ignorance. Rae is effectively saying that he no longer cares for any material or non-material worldly goals because they have no value to him. His only concern is
practice, something that can take him to a higher level of being and transcend all human-created meanings.

6.9.3 Conclusion: Rae’s paradigmatic insights

For many years Rae tried to change the nature of his mind through numerous techniques but all involved coercion. He had failed miserably but finally discovered doo chit through Asoke. When Asoke encouraged him to throw away everything he had learnt, he did so and this led to a paradigm shift. The paradigm shift was about practice as purely observation rather than interference and coercion. Practice was about seeing not doing. This flew in the face of conventional thinking and, hence, was a monumental shift in mindset. He also began to understand that practice was something that could be done by anyone, in any place and at any time as long as one was not immersed in thoughts and had awareness. Practice was really simple and relevant to ordinary people who worked, had a family and led ordinary lives. Contrary to popular opinion, practice was not something requiring great skill, concentrative power or superhuman effort. Rather, practice was unadulterated, detached research into the nature of the human mind, and the tools were awareness and observation. What was remarkable was that it had the power to change human beings.

The proof that doo chit was the correct Buddhist path, at least for him, was the attainment of sotapanna, the first stage of enlightenment. Sotapanna is transcendence of mundane existence, a state of being that is virtually free of ordinary forms of suffering. When this is achieved a transformation of worldviews from material to immaterial occurs, that is to say, a view of life as real based on human-created values is replaced by a view of life as empty. To put it another way, Rae simply has let go of all ideas considered important by ordinary people in favour of emptiness and liberation. Attainment of sotapanna was achieved through right view of existence: insight into the nature of reality including any part of self as the three characteristics. It is a view of life at the ultimate level superimposed over a view of life at the conventional level. Thus, Rae continues to dispense his duties as father, husband and teacher even though the world holds no meaning for him. However, the trajectory of his life has changed inexorably from one decidedly worldly to one grounded in the spiritual path of Buddhism.

6.10 Conclusion to Chapter 6

This chapter has described and analysed fundamental Buddhist beliefs that underpin the paradigms of the nine participants. It has also explored the process of transformation: how the participants came to adopt these beliefs and how this adoption has changed the way they interact with the world.
This chapter has also highlighted many different practices from a number of Buddhist traditions that have been used by the participants to aid personal transformation. The variety of techniques available is one of the strengths of Buddhism: there are many ways of solving existential problems for different types of people and different kinds of problems. However, all Buddhist practices serve to undermine the conventional paradigm of seeing and being.

Each section in this chapter has also illustrated the inseparability of practice and Buddhist beliefs: the idea that practice is essential to understanding, sustaining and integrating Buddhist beliefs within a paradigmatic whole. Each section underscores that Buddhism, despite containing many theories, is fundamentally a practice religion that focuses on seeing oneself and the world differently.

Table 6.1 provides a summary of the practices used by the participants, the Buddhist beliefs they adopted and the application of these beliefs and practices in their life.

Table 6.1: Summary of practice, paradigmatic beliefs and real life application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Buddhist Paradigmatic Beliefs</th>
<th>Real Life Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uthai</td>
<td>• Continuous mindfulness through the four foundations of mindfulness</td>
<td>• Existence according to three characteristics&lt;br&gt;• World as duality&lt;br&gt;• Law of karma – karma the result of naivety and desire</td>
<td>• Facing any situation e.g. driving a car, receiving money, wanting something or a particular state of mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>• Mindfulness of breathing&lt;br&gt;• Metta meditation</td>
<td>• Non-self; self/identity as just a vision&lt;br&gt;• No control of complexes&lt;br&gt;• Letting go leads to transformation</td>
<td>• Dealing with personal embarrassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zara</td>
<td>• Goenka vipassana</td>
<td>• Everything occurring in mind and body is sensation&lt;br&gt;• Everything is impermanent and temporary</td>
<td>• Coping with a family crisis&lt;br&gt;• Coping with death of first husband (described in chapter 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>• Goenka vipassana&lt;br&gt;• Other practices&lt;br&gt;• Joanna Macy’s technique</td>
<td>• Same as Zara&lt;br&gt;• Interdependence of self and world as the basis for conducting life</td>
<td>• Managing relationship with spouse&lt;br&gt;• Increasing effectiveness of activism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>• Tantric practice&lt;br&gt;• Various Tibetan practices e.g. manjushri (purifying speech) &amp; contemplative prayer (sedana)&lt;br&gt;• Practice of compassion&lt;br&gt;• Vipassana</td>
<td>• Tibetan Buddhism as comprehensive set of beliefs for viewing the self and world&lt;br&gt;• Karma is one belief for explaining happenings in the world&lt;br&gt;• Life is suffering but way out possible</td>
<td>• Coping with childhood abuse&lt;br&gt;• Healing relationship with father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>• Sitting meditation&lt;br&gt;• Teaching&lt;br&gt;• Daily life practice&lt;br&gt;• Experiencing, labelling &amp; distancing of thoughts, feelings</td>
<td>• Thoughts and reality are separate; thoughts are filtered versions of reality&lt;br&gt;• Interdependent view of self and world: emptiness</td>
<td>• Dealing with anger or frustration in a difficult meeting&lt;br&gt;• Performing duty looking after an elderly relative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Mia, Quinn’s and Kacy’s mental models for understanding the world – their paradigms - are similar in that they have a strong cosmological character. This is because they are based on many Buddhist cosmological beliefs that the participants have studied and adopted. Analysis and integration of these beliefs have created an elaborate “intellectual roadmap” that guides action. Old Christian or conventional beliefs have been abandoned.

An example of an important belief at the heart of these participants’ paradigms is the concept of karma. Karma has been influential in encouraging Mia and Kacy to become more compassionate to every living being. While Mia has always been a staunch advocate of animal welfare, the impact is clearer with Kacy who now makes great effort to protect even the lives of ants in her house (K17-K18, K41). Overall, karma places the responsibility on the individual and stretches that responsibility over a very long time horizon (over lifetimes). It also creates a logic which pushes each participant to explore the subtleties of cause, consequence and interrelatedness. One result of believing in karma is that the practice of mindfulness becomes a necessity to ensure that action is based on awareness, thoughtfulness and kindness in every sphere of life.

Another example is the belief that life can be characterised by suffering. For Mia and Kacy, this resonated easily given their past experience of abuse, and the understanding of suffering blossomed the deeper they studied. In the same vein, Quinn was also immersed in suffering during much of his early life. However, he chose to develop his own theory of why suffering arises. His theory concerns the erroneous views of self (as fixed, real and separate) and the traits that differentiate human beings from other species (self-consciousness and physiology). The theory explains why humans mistreat each

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Quinn</strong></th>
<th><strong>Kacy</strong></th>
<th><strong>Rae</strong></th>
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</table>
| - Therapeutic blasphemy  
- Metta bhavana including self-love  
- Mindfulness  
- Antidotes | - Mantras  
- Mindfulness of breathing & in daily life  
- Metta meditation  
- Tonglen | - Practice about seeing not doing  
- Unadulterated observation of mind  
- Practice any place or time but requires awareness |
| - Self as fluid, interdependent, impermanent and insubstantial  
- Optimism about human potential | - Opening the possibilities of human existence for a better world  
- Purity of compassion  
- Enlightened business paradigm | - Sotapanna is transcendence of mundane existence  
- World as empty - all values human creation  
- Reality as three characteristics of existence |
| - Overcoming deep Catholic conditioning of guilt and self-hatred  
- Improving relationship with others | - Transforming purpose of business to serve society rather than the ego  
- Adoption of 10 ethical principles from Geshe Michael Roach  
- Changing mode of living in rural, semi-retirement  
- Dharma in practice | - Eradication of ordinary suffering in life with regards to family, work and society |
other, why environmental degradation occurs and why the vicious cycle of suffering perpetuates. Quinn’s theory offers a philosophical path to getting rid of suffering by abandoning erroneous views and harnessing the power of self-consciousness. Indeed, the key to his view of life is not the fact that there is suffering, but that there is a solution to it that creates happiness. Quinn’s understanding is based on optimism at the prospect of the great possibilities of existence and this optimism is something that provides the power for change. In fact, optimism has been the common force for all three participants enabling them to discard destructive conditionings, to become “happy, sane, integrated” individuals, and to seek higher goals in life.

In conclusion, Buddhism has changed the paradigms of Mia, Quinn and Kacy by replacing key beliefs concerning the nature of human beings and how the world works. Practice, study and application in life have enabled the paradigms to be understood and developed over time. Optimism has fuelled their continued efforts. The combination of all these things has resulted in behavioural and attitudinal change.

Like in many aspects of life, Isaac is unique. While his beliefs are strongly based on Buddhism, he incorporates various kinds of knowledge from indigenous cultures and Western psychotherapy. For example, Isaac shares the belief of non-self with Quinn and Uthai but his interpretation is tied to Jungian psychology. He proposes that what is perceived as self is composed of a series of complexes which when clung to form self-identity. Hence self is merely a created vision. Understanding this can lead to the discovery of the factors controlling behaviour. Isaac demonstrates the application of this theory by recounting an episode when he became highly embarrassed because of a too rigid definition of who he was and the resulting manifestation of an inferiority complex. A second example of a belief instrumental to Isaac’s life and practice is the idea of letting go, but again his interpretation is unique. Isaac uses the principle of DROPS, an acronym he coined to stress relinquishment of control and being more in tune with the happenings of the mind without repressing. He then extends the concept further to explain why the controlling tendency of human beings has been taken to an extreme in the present society and the detrimental effects on well-being, health and the environment. So the idea of letting go has implication for both personal practice (coming back to oneself and the immediate state of mind) and political action (coming back to awareness of the true constituents of social well-being, such as community and friendship, and making effort to help others realise this). Thus, while Isaac is similar to other participants with a theoretical outlook on Buddhism, especially Quinn and Uthai, his paradigm contains somewhat unorthodox beliefs that broaden into the realm of politics.
The paradigms of Frank and Rae are much less dependent on Buddhist conceptualisations of the world. Rather, they are based on practice: the direct and unmediated coming to terms with the human experience. Thus, Frank places a strong emphasis on thoughts especially during daily life and Rae focuses on the transitory nature of mental phenomena. It should not be surprising then that Rae’s *doo chit* and Frank’s Zen practices are greatly similar. Both emphasise detached observation and both emphasise the separation between reality and thoughts or feelings. Both also lead to emptiness but here there is a difference, at least on the surface. Frank’s notion of emptiness is grounded in the intrinsic interdependence of all things although the idea of interdependence is something words can do no justice:

I mean once again human definitions are inadequate but we can define emptiness, I suppose, in intellectual terms – it’s very limited – not as the absence of anything but as the complete interdependence of everything. (F10 - stress in original)

Transformation occurs as a result of seeing this complete interdependence because separation of self and world begins to fade:

So if we really recognise that and if we really experience that through our practice in some way then that will transform our view of life. I mean it has to. Because we begin with a view of ourselves as separate, but we through practice can come to a view of ourselves as dependent and interdependent. (F10)

On the other hand, Rae’s notion of emptiness is based on the idea that all things are devoid of intrinsic value because values are humanly assigned. Hence emptiness is the emptiness of meaning and practice then concerns trying to exist more serenely in the void. However, it must be said that the concept of interdependence is also fundamental in Rae’s Theravada tradition but the link with practice is less clear perhaps because interdependence is a very deep concept and its realisation associated with the highest levels of practice. Frank’s grasp of interdependence is more developed, for example, he states:

… a single act of practice, a single act of awareness, a single act of presence resonates. (F10)

However, true to Zen, he shuns speculation on what the impact of practice and awareness might be. So, while the practice is similar for both Frank and Rae, it is Frank who makes the connection between that which is meaningless and that which is interdependent.

Frank and Rae are not the only participants that incorporate the belief of emptiness as part of their paradigm. Uthai, Zara and Abby also have adopted the belief although the term ‘emptiness’ is not used. When Uthai describes the world as the three characteristics of existence, he is nullifying all other meanings. When he simplifies this to the idea of dualities, he is reducing the world to a set of rules that wipes away all conventional thinking. Uthai does not articulate emptiness but merely lives it in the same way as Rae. The law of karma is purely cosmological add-on – theoretical explanations of how
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the world works - but it has little effect on how he leads his life. Likewise, Zara’s belief that everything that occurs in the mind and the body consists of sensations is also reductionist in nature. It folds everything into the Buddhist scheme of the four basic elements rendering them impersonal, or in other words, empty. Where Abby differs is her activist or ‘engaged’ stance. While the dissolution of self is also fundamental to her, that dissolution paradoxically deepens the connection with others. Her continual practice, far from being isolationist, has increased her commitment to social and environmental justice because loosening the grip of self-grasping leads to more open-hearted engagement. As she puts it:

Each time I do a retreat, deeper levels of clinging fall away, and the resulting freedom gives me more energy, joy and passion for what I am doing in the world. (A16)

Thus, Abby provides the clearest example of how a shift in paradigm, intimately linked with continual practice, increases the connection of oneself with the world, and produces a realisation that we are all part of the whole of life and that the idea of separation is purely illusory. Abby teaches us that our responsibility to self and our responsibility to world cannot be compartmentalised. On the contrary, the personal, the social and the environmental realms are inextricably linked. While in reality we may work on each facet as if they are independent, this is because of our lack of perspicacity. In truth, our responsibility is neither to self nor world but is always both at the same time and at every instance. Practice is the practice of realising this, and to do so leads to something truly transformative of human mind, human action and human spirit.
CHAPTER 7: HAPPINESS AND PURPOSE

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on paradigms and the constituent beliefs that the participants subscribe to. As such, it provides the framework and background for understanding the two subjects in this chapter, namely, the notion of ‘happiness’ and ‘purpose in life’ because these are necessarily derived from the participants’ way of looking at themselves and the world. To put it another way, the paradigms of the participants lead directly to how they construe the meaning of happiness and how their purpose in life is formulated, and how these then replace the conventional views of the present culture. Hence, this chapter addresses Research Question 3:

To what extent, and in what ways, does the process of transformation contribute to a change in purpose and goals of life and notion of happiness?

The first part of the chapter (Section 7.2) concerns happiness and documents each participant’s attempt to elucidate the meaning of happiness and the constituent elements of happiness. Unfortunately, the notion of happiness is an elusive subject and many participants struggled to express their understanding. Happiness – even with many theoretical interpretations available from Buddhism - is very personal and often depends on the life experiences and level of practice of the individual. So the aim of this section is not so much to forward a systematic treatise of happiness. Rather, the aim is to provide a sense of the variety of interpretations that often differ greatly from the conventional wisdom, and a glimmer of the possibilities.

The second part of this chapter (Section 7.3) concerns purpose in life of the participants. Purpose determines the direction and orientation of an individual in life and is thus an important factor in shaping behaviour and action. Purpose is consistent with the idea of system goals within Meadows’ scheme because the formation of system goals necessarily starts with individual goals which then through consensus become system (societal) goals. The term ‘purpose’ is used in this study instead of ‘goals’ because it has a wider meaning and allows a more expansive exploration within the interview setting. This chapter presents the findings for each participant as analysed in the text but leaves more detailed discussion of implications on sustainability for Chapter 9.
7.2 Happiness

7.2.1 Zara

For Zara, happiness was something tangible, something she experienced on a daily basis, something reflected in her outlook, her mannerisms.\footnote{Although I met Zara only once, I sincerely believe this to be true. This is based on the way she carried herself, the way she interacted with others, her outward appearance that radiated something special and information from the interview.} When asked what she thought happiness was, she replied without hesitation:

Happiness is a state of peace of mind. It’s peace of mind. It’s an inner joy. It’s an inner happiness that is not dependent on what I have or what I don’t have on the outside, in terms of family, everything. (Z8)

There are two parts to her description of happiness: peace of mind and non-dependence. Non-dependence is about not having to rely on externalities such material objects or other people to induce happiness. Rather, happiness is derived from inner qualities of the mind that can be developed. Peace of mind meaning a mind that is at peace is a more difficult concept to understand. Peace of mind can be understood by examining her experience when her first husband was dying of cancer (as already described in Section 5.3.2). It is worth restating her words again:

So we got him settled [in hospital] and I went back to their place that night. And it was interesting because, as soon as I sat down to meditate, this wonderful ... it was like being suffused with peace. Just peace settled down. The mind became very calm, very peaceful and it wasn’t at an intellectual level; it was at a physical level. And that was something that stayed with me for the entire six weeks of his illness up until his death. (Z5)

It is noteworthy that Zara describes achieving peace as ‘to settle down’. To settle down is to go from a high level of agitation to stillness. To remain in stillness is to find a firm foundation where the mind cannot be easily rattled. That stillness was felt at the physical level; that is to say, it is not an intellectual override even if such a thing was possible. That stillness also includes an element of equanimity preventing the mind from being engrossed in turmoil, or “jumping up and down” and “rolling in our emotions” (Z5). Hence for Zara those six weeks leading up to her husband’s death, rather than enduring, turned out into a period of peace and calm. No ups and downs, no negative perturbation of the mind – just an uncanny tranquillity. When her husband finally died there was no sorrow or grief, just an utter acceptance of life – and death.

Paradoxically this story provides a clear insight into the unconventional meaning of happiness. Facing death cannot in any circumstances be construed as happiness. Yet facing death can result in something sufficiently concrete as to be fundamental to human well-being. That something contains an element of
peace, calmness and tranquillity. That something is sustained by resolute equanimity. That something fosters a confidence that reinforces inner self-reliance. That something enables seeing “the reality of life as it manifests itself” making existence serene (Z5). Yes, serenity is perhaps as good a word as any to describe Zara’s happiness.

### 7.2.2 Abby

Abby makes a clear distinction between happiness and pleasure. As she states, “Pleasure is associated with a thing like a material possession or going to a good movie or eating some good food” (A6). Pleasure is pleasure of an external object or experience gained through the senses. It is enjoyable, not to be scorn upon and “part of having a good life” (A6). However, it is by nature conditioned, impermanent and cannot be relied on. Happiness on the other hand is “a sense of internal well-being”, something deeper and less transitive (A6). When probed further Abby, sitting on a naturally-lit verandah, a pleasant afternoon unfolding, was able to describe the experience of happiness as:

> It’s partly physical, you know. I feel as though I can sort of feel sensation of warmth and well-being in the heart centre of the body. I’m enjoying just sitting here reflecting on this and I can hear the birds in the background. I think it’s the readiness of the heart to notice that. It’s very much about being present, in the moment and just responsive to what is. (A6)

The rhythm of her voice suggests a slower pace of things in tune with the natural surrounding. Just like Zara (and expectedly so given the same vipassana practice) the experience of happiness is felt in the body, in “the heart centre” in her case. The passage also conveys the idea of ease of living, neither wanting nor struggling. As she puts it, happiness is “a deep sense of contentment with how things are” (A6). This contentment is reflected by her appreciation of the simple joys of life, for example, the birds chirping in the garden or contemplating life’s lessons. Yet contentment is underpinned by being present and being aware, qualities that allow “the readiness of the heart to notice” and the ability to be “responsive to what is”.

An examination of other parts of the interview also reveals an understanding of happiness in terms of equanimity. Equanimity is something notable especially in Abby’s relationship with Isaac, her husband. Abby refers to the progress made in this facet of her character as “wonderful” while exuding pleasure detectable in her tone and facial expression (A5). This suggests that not only does equanimity support happiness but also the development of equanimity itself leads to satisfaction, another form of happiness. Thus, the process adds to the end result. Overall, equanimity is about being “more solid” and “less able to be pulled around by the eight worldly conditions” (A6). It provides confidence and stability in

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2 To reiterate, the eight worldly conditions are: gain and loss, fame and defamation, praise and ridicule, joy and sorrow.
whatever life throws at her and is a core element of happiness along side contentment and being present.

7.2.3 Isaac

Isaac struggled to express what happiness was for him. When he could muster some words, his explanation was unsure, stammered and filled with pauses:

Happiness is ... a state of being. It is felt in my body, mind as well-being. And it’s ... it’s ... for me, it’s ... at one level, it’s simply the absence of major pain and things like that and mental pain and anguish, whatever. So it has elements of tranquillity to it, but ... also an edge of delight ... so appreciation is ... happiness for me is linked to love and appreciation and a sense of wonder and gratitude. (I32)

From this description, happiness consists of two main elements: tranquillity and delight. Tranquillity is freedom from both physical and mental suffering. However, his intonation and the use of the terms “at one level” indicate that he views it as a necessary foundation but not something special to dwell on. Rather, it is delight that captures the meaning of happiness better. Delight is “love”, “appreciation”, “wonder”, and “gratitude”, but it also embodies a lack of attachment. Isaac uses the example of antiques, something close to his heart, and the business of buying and selling them to illustrate:

And being an antique dealer is good practice in that: I love these things and you’ve got it and then you pass it on. And the more you like something the better you are at selling it. If you love the thing, you’ll sell it like that because the person feels your delight in it ... So the more you love something as an antique dealer the more you’re have to learn to let go of it because that will be communicated. And you see that there is so much beauty coming and you learn to let go like that ... (I32)

So delight is not merely finding fulfillment in something but also an act of gratitude that comes with freedom from attachment. Hence delight finds reason to be happy yet graciously lets go of what it has found. Delight is a philosophy for living lightly and in tune with the Buddhist idea of impermanence.

Isaac’s description of happiness, though interesting, seems somewhat shallow. However, perhaps it should not be surprising given his unique character. The notion of happiness is usually regarded as personal and often associated with individualism. Unfortunately, Isaac rails against such a view decrying, “Individualism sees one’s own worth and needs above those of others,” and “is pathological or sick confidence, because it only sees the self and its ‘needs’” (I39). Rather, Buddhism is based on “healthy clarity and confidence in oneself AND as respect for others” (I40 – capitals in original). It is only through achieving this balance that the Buddhist path “opens us to our common humanity” (I40). Most significantly Isaac draws on a passage in the Pali Cannon describing the imperatives of this path:
“Protecting oneself, one protects others.”

“Protecting others, one protects oneself.” (I43)

Protecting oneself is done through bhavana (mental development) while protecting others is done through ethics, loving-kindness and giving. This dynamic oneness of the individual and society sums up Isaac’s view of life, existence and purpose. He is fundamentally communal, a social animal in the deepest sense. It follows then that his understanding of happiness is no different. His happiness is not found in any state of detachment or meditative rapture, or at least it is not valued so. Rather, it is wedded to the happiness of others. It is happiness in relation to others. It is happiness in action. Perhaps that is why his happiness is difficult to describe in words. However, when it arises it is palpable. This I witnessed as he taught in the meditation hall his words soulfully falling on soft ears (I35). I sensed it as he walked easily among friends during the break. I saw it in his eyes lit with delight as he recounted being named Wititj by the aboriginal elders (I36, I37, I38). I felt it as he drove me through the thick bush of the retreat grounds, his zeal addictive. In the end, defining happiness for him may be elusive but it is almost always found in community when he is serving, sharing and giving. It is felt in the heart, among many.

7.2.4 Kacy

Kacy’s introduction to happiness in Buddhism was when she first met the Dalai Lama and experienced being “dharma high”, a euphoric state of mind somewhat comparable to being on drugs (K2). However, that feeling has long dissipated and happiness now is viewed as contentment, as she describes:

> For me, it would be about being content, which means ... this is just what’s happening now, it’s OK ... So it is about being able to be in a state of not wanting to be somewhere else or wanting something else or whatever. Even if it’s really not a nice situation ... you’re saying that’s how it is – it’s all right. That for me would be complete happiness ... (K12)

Thus, for Kacy, happiness is a feeling of contentment with the way things are at any given time. A part of this feeling is the appreciation of the basic experiences in life, something she is able to do more in semi-retirement. These experiences are simply ‘ordinary’ moments that make one pause and reflect:

> ... you actually have little points where you’re just sitting somewhere or just walking along the beach and ... pretty good! Usually something really, really simple. Or sometime when you’re eating a really nice mango or something ... or like they say in Australia, “You wouldn’t be dead for quids” – that kind of moment. (K12)

The Australian slang “You wouldn’t be dead for quids” refers to a life situation so good that no amount of money or anything could replace. It is simply being happy and just experiencing the moment. Some
of her examples such as “walking along the beach” and “diving into a wave” represent the Australian love of the outdoors but others such as “just sitting”, “eating a mango” and “doing nothing” are just common activities (K12). However, all of them give rise to wonder and satisfaction, and help sustain contentment.

Kacy’s understanding of happiness as contentment can be applied in several areas of her life. Firstly concerning work, contentment is embodied in Michael Roach’s Principle 8: Find happiness in what you have (K31). Hence this is about being happy with what has been achieved rather than being goaded on by hunger for more success. It is also about celebrating other people’s achievement rather than competing and comparing. Kacy has taken up this challenge by selling her business and working part-time earning less than half of what she did. Secondly, contentment is about leading a less materialistic lifestyle by making attitude changes to counter acquisitiveness. As an example, the change might be from “I’ve got this car now; I will get [a new] one that will make me happy” to “Aren’t I actually lucky to have a car” (K31) or, in other words, from wanting to grat

7.2.5 Quinn

Based on experience, Quinn states unequivocally that pleasure and happiness are not the same. Pleasure is derived from sensual experiences associated with material goods and consumption while happiness exudes a different quality that includes serenity, stability and subtlety (Q13). However, people especially in the West³ often make the mistake and hence the reason why overconsumption is rampant:

I think that Western people equate happiness with pleasure. We’re pleasure seeking; we’re pleasure oriented. That’s why, especially in this materialistic society at the moment, people are always going after adrenalin rushers and consumerism. (Q13)

³ While Quinn highlights this trait as Western, it is probably applicable to all cultures; pleasure has not been something human beings of all cultures have shied away from throughout the ages.
This gives rise to phenomena such as retail therapy and leads to wastefulness while not achieving happiness. Rather, the Buddhist notion of happiness is more to do with “a sense of unmixed ease” (Q13) and “a more refined state of being” (Q14). This consists of “an absence of inner conflicts, an absence of guilt, feeling of contentment, of tranquillity” and “being at ease with oneself” (Q14). The interpretation is greatly influenced by Quinn’s experience of Catholic conditioning and hence there is an emphasis on resolving inner tensions such as irrational guilt, self-hatred, feeling a failure and excessive self-analysis (Q14, Q15). Resolution of these negative tendencies facilitates positive aspects of self such as contentment and tranquillity. The result is an almost childlike natural happiness characterised by being “care-free, spontaneous, taking joy from living in the present, playing, [and] laughing” (Q50).

For Quinn, an intense form of happiness can also occur in retreats, something he has experienced extensively. He depicts this happiness with terms such as “very joyful”, “almost ecstatic” and “bliss” (F14). He also adds, “Sensual pleasure seems to be coarse in comparison” (F14). Quinn believes that this happiness results from dhyanas because dhyanas are “higher states of consciousness” that are “happier, more concentrated and more refined than our normal consciousness” (Q50). Thus, the happiness in dhyanas is something Buddhism can bring about and this experience also facilitates comparison with ordinary kinds of happiness to enhance understanding the range of possibilities.

7.2.6 Mia

For Mia, happiness is a difficult concept partly because she has experienced it so rarely. What she does know is that the conventional idea is not it:

I’ve found it hard to attribute happiness to certain things that other people might think are happy ... like buying a car, ... [I] got given a diamond ring and I sort of felt, “Oh yeah?” ... Like things that other people says what’s happening they might describe as nice moments but to me they’re just kind of still messy moments. (M24)

Likewise socialising is not happiness:

... sitting around having a dinner conversation and stuff like that with friends, I don’t necessarily call that being happy – I’m feeling pleasant maybe, or I’m feeling social or stuff like that. (M25)

Rather, happiness is “reserved for the most extreme moments of ... interconnectedness” (M25). These moments are exceptional moments where the boundary between her, others and the world begins to blur. These highly experiential moments can only be described in her own words:

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4 Also known as jhana or meditative absorptions.
Like sometimes maybe somebody would be talking to me about something they’re upset about and going through. And you can have this long conversation; you’re really, really wrapped up in somebody’s world and what’s going on for them or something. There’ll come a moment when I’ll go, you know, everything that they’ve been sort of struggling with, just suddenly your eyes will meet, and you’ll see it in their eyes. They’ll go, “It doesn’t matter, does it.” And I just get this dissolving feeling like my whole body and their body is dissolved for a second. Everything around, all the tightness around the heart will dissipate, and mine too. It sort of releases you to feel for a moment absolutely no ... like you’re out of prison ... like you’re still sitting there seeing everything but you’re just not constricted by anything. And you’re not just the body. That moment you could be the sky, the floor and the table and that person and none of it, and all of it. You know, just for a moment. And you know that that person is there. And you know that they may never be able to describe it, the same as you can never really describe it. (M24)

These surreal moments cannot be easily understood - intellectualisation impossible. But perhaps they are moments when a mix of freedom and absolute empathy emerges wiping away the boundary of existence. Another example that happened while she was sitting on a crowded bus in India illustrates similar ideas:

... I was heading back to see my lama and Ian was asleep and it was in India, and it was a local bus ... but I was sitting there and I suddenly had this feeling that I was on the most direct path to my lama. And it was ... just like I was the whole bus; I was like everyone in the bus; I was like the sky; I was like the grasses; I was like the ground; I was like where we started from and where we ended up. It was just like, just for a little moment, I just felt absolutely blissfully happy. (M24)

Moments like these, fleeting as they are, provide a frame of reference for what constitutes happiness for Mia but are difficult to understand. And it is unlikely that they can be easily replicated. However, a more astute analysis, given her history, is of Mia as someone still searching for a new sense of self, but the notion of happiness is yet uncertain within this scheme. As already described, Mia was severely abused as a child and the depravity ensured that she was mentally scarred. This manifested itself as virulent anger, fear and self-hatred and drove her to drugs, sexual misuse and social isolationism. Her life until she met Buddhism was never about happiness. Jumping straight into Buddhist cosmology gave her a new understanding of life but that understanding centred on suffering and its alleviation. Alleviation has involved a number of ways but one result has been the development of positive emotions such as compassion and equanimity. It is in this context that Mia’s exploration of happiness should be understood. For her, happiness conjures up a different kind of existence where compassion reigns, separation fades and the hearts and minds of beings unite. Though her description of happiness is as entralling as it is enigmatic, it is suspiciously similar to the notion of emptiness, the complete interdependence of all things. If that is the case, then attainment of such a state is the task of a lifetime (or longer). In the infinite timescale of Buddhism, this is a fair and necessary undertaking. However, in
the here and now of everyday living it could be said that Mia’s happiness is best defined by a return to normality. That normality is a state of being where negative emotions are held at bay and her true identity revealed undisturbed, allowing a multitude of options that was deprived from her for much of her life to present itself. This happiness, or lack of suffering, is a crucial foundation to the highest form of happiness that she aspires to where words simply do no justice.

7.2.7 Uthai

For Uthai, the meditative joy he experienced after three days of mantra practice was a revelation (U2). That joy can be expressed as tranquillity so deep as to verge on eeriness and accompanied by bodily symptoms such as lightness, tears and standing body hair. It was a form of happiness that was far superior to anything he had experienced before and became the allure of Buddhism, something he hungered for during his early practice life. Unfortunately, it was a form of happiness that was unsustainable, difficult to access and had negative after-effects. Further practice taught him that true happiness, something that could be achieved all the time, was contentment and that this can only be gained through the acceptance of dharmachart, the way things are. Acceptance of dharmachart meant understanding it and one simple but effective way of doing so was to view it as dualities. The example below on dealing with dualities adds to several already given in previous chapters but it clearly illustrates the idea of contentment.

Uthai operates a large food company with many outlets. One lucrative product is moon cake because of its high volume. However, the business is seasonal: the moon cakes are made in advance and the bulk sold during a few festive days. This leads to the risk of making too much or too little:

> Usually, I estimate the amount we’re going to sell this year, for example, one million pieces which we have to make beforehand ... Therefore on the last day of the festive period the volume of cakes sold is enormous – lots of people buy, a huge quantity sold. So on this day you will know whether your estimate was correct or incorrect. So if you make a mistake you will not have enough to sell and there will be a shortage and an opportunity lost. And if you make the opposite mistake, you have too much which will go to waste. (U11)

However, Uthai points out that this kind of thinking is economic thinking, where success and happiness are tied to making the right prediction. For him, economic thinking will always produce an abundance of frustration because the chances of making the right prediction are relatively small. Uthai’s solution is to practice contentment. This involves being comfortable with the decision made no matter what the consequence. If too little is made, as just had happened the day before the interview, utilising economic thinking is inappropriate and is devoid of generosity. He explains:
Like yesterday, I sold out because I underestimated the demand; there was a shortage especially of the fillings that people wanted ran out, but other fillings remained but not much even then. In economic thinking this is a great opportunity loss. Why? Because competitors will take advantage since they have product and you don’t, and so they can sell and their name will become more well-known. This is business thinking. But I don’t think that way. I think if I estimate this amount I’m very happy to sell everything, and others will have opportunities. So others can have opportunities as well! (U11)

And if too much is made then celebration should also be in order since more people can enjoy moon cakes:

If there is some left, then [I’m] very happy. We will discount 50% so more people can have the opportunity to eat our cakes. (U11)

Rather than feeling disgruntled, Uthai suggests that our happiness should be subservient to the indomitable law of dhammachart. Rather than denouncing dhammachart’s foul play, or blame ourselves for lack of judgement, acceptance should be our recourse. However, the depth of Uthai thinking is apparent when he asks us to do this not only during episodes of mercantilist urge but during ordinary activities such as paying bills, receiving gifts, eating food, being praised and desiring peace - the law of duality persists in each and every situation. In this way, happiness that is contentment can always be experienced no matter where we are or what we do. Because if we really are concerned with the subtle shifts in the mind and if we understand that the mind is blown every which way by likes and dislikes, then happiness is not about seeking anything in particular but accepting fully those things that happen. Hence Uthai’s happiness is about maintaining composure, equanimity and integrity of the mind with consistency and continuity while persevering with our efforts in worldly affairs. In this way, the mind is protected, aligns with dhammachart and “remains joyous at all time” (U12).

**7.2.8 Frank**

When asked what happiness was, Frank paused then laughed. When he spoke, it was apparent that this was a difficult subject. For Frank, conventional happiness means:

Things are going my way. Things are going well. And physically well. The conditions of my life are adequate. Have no major problems. (F13)

However, happiness in Zen is about “being comfortable with the way things are” (F13). This is easy when everything is going well but can become a struggle when the situation turns difficult. In the case of the latter, then practice becomes not an option but a necessity:

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5 Uthai’s indifference to the vicissitudes of fortune is reminiscent of Stoicism. The only difference is that while Stoics deal with whatever arises through daily premeditations, Uthai tackles it through mindfulness which in his interpretation appears similar to Stoical methodology except with greater intensity as it is practiced on a moment-to-moment basis.
If you become very ill you have to practice with that. You have no choice. You face life and death. You face mortality. You face lack of control. You experience everything that you don’t want. It’s a tremendous opportunity for practice. And, in a way, you’re pushed into practice. You have to engage with those experiences. (F13, stress in original)

Frank says that some Zen teachers even assert that it is a gift to be presented with difficulties (F14); difficulties are opportunities to observe and come to terms with ourselves and how we react to them. By doing so, we can learn that adverse situations, even “intense struggles”, are not by nature negative. If we practice in such a way and begin to cope better then something resembling confidence and solidity emerges, and this becomes a foundation for life. Thus, this is one way of understanding ‘happiness’ as a deeper sense of security from life’s vicissitudes, something that helps ground us in the reality of existence.

Something also arises in zazen (sitting meditation), something Frank acknowledges as “enjoyment” and “great joy” (F14). However, Frank believes that it is misleading to call what arises ‘happiness’. This is because, firstly, the purpose of zazen is to observe the body and mind and not to seek happiness. Secondly, what arises is again entirely different from the conventional idea of happiness, as he explains:

... the joy that comes through practice is of a different quality because it is the joy that arises from our true aspiration, our true realisation of ourselves, of who we are fundamentally. That’s a kind of joy ... it’s different in quality from being happy ... mostly when we’re happy it’s just we’re getting what we want. (F14)

Frank is telling us to consider happiness in Zen as something so different as to make the term ‘happiness’ inappropriate. Happiness in Zen concerns a sense of confidence based on practice yet more importantly it is a deep sense of connection with our inner roots. However, as hard as we try, words will always be inadequate because ‘happiness’ in Zen is something that can only be experienced and beyond ordinary conception. It is happiness at the most existential level.

7.2.9 Rae

Rae experienced the ultimate kind of happiness during the first two weeks after attaining sotapanna (first stage of enlightenment) when his mind was sharp, his awareness was continuous and suffering was nonexistent. Although things did not remain that way, the experience caused a transformation at the core of his being. He was a different man and this was reflected in his outlook on happiness, or to be more precise, he abandoned all previously held notions of happiness.

Rae now believes that happiness in the ordinary understanding of the word is not happiness at all but, rather, a mistaken view lacking insight into the true nature of the mind and its restricted capacity:
For example, someone having a good life, living in a good environment, encountering only good things, having success – these seem like happiness. However, they’re just worldly happiness. Is there true happiness there? No, doesn’t exist. Doesn’t exist. Behind that happiness lies suffering. There’s no true happiness. Anytime the mind experiences happiness or joy you’ll actually find that the mind is being locked up in a cage - a nice cage. But when you’re suffering it feels like being locked up in a horrible cage. Whichever cage it’s in, there’s no freedom for the mind. We’re just locked up with limits and boundaries. (R16)

Rae is saying that what we experience as happiness is really an illusion. In fact, we are locked up, in a beautiful house when happiness reigns and in a prison cell when unhappiness rears its head – different environments, same outcome. This belief is not derived from theory, analysis or something he read. Rather, it is something he feels every living moment leading him to muse:

... as I live normally right now it’s like my mind is imprisoned, in an enclosure of some kind. It’s not truly free. (R16)

Ironically, despite attaining sotapanna, Rae is still experiencing suffering albeit a much subtler, existential kind. This suffering is suffering of the mind as it remains attached to parts, aspects or certain nature of self:

A mind attached to goodness is suffering. A mind attached to unwholesomeness is suffering. A mind attached to equanimity is suffering. Attachment to the mind itself or the body is suffering. (R19)

Sotapanna is only the first stage and so not everything is perfect. For Rae his attachment to self, unlike his attachment to worldly things, is still strong:

I can fathom the emptiness outside but whenever I look inside it’s never empty. (R24).

Hence enlightenment where everything including the body and mind is empty and no suffering or attachment occurs still eludes him. However, he has a prescient understanding that enlightenment has nothing to do with “the mind being conditioned by happiness, [or] being overshadowed by happiness” (R16). Rather, enlightenment is something beyond all mental states and is associated with total liberation. Enlightenment is true freedom and for Rae this is the ultimate meaning of happiness.

7.3 Purpose in Life

7.3.1 Zara

Zara’s purpose in life is “to keep growing” spiritually and work toward her own “liberation [that] is free from misery, free from suffering” (Z10). This means developing the mind so that it becomes “transcendently pure” like that of an arahant (enlightened being). An arahant’s mind is freed from
the defilements of anger, craving and ignorance, see things as they are and is fully present (Z10). It is full of compassion for other beings without any egocentrism. For Zara, these qualities can be best attained through continual \textit{vipassana} practice and that involves learning not to react to sensations and cultivating kindness.

\subsection*{7.3.2 Abby}

Abby’s purpose in life is:

\begin{quote}
To live in service of life now and the ongoing ability of life to continue to unfold in the future. (A7)
\end{quote}

This is a dedication to alleviate the suffering of every life form on earth and to help as many individuals as possible. It stems from her Buddhist practice and passion for social and environmental justice. Convergence of the two through the work of Joanna Macy gave it impetus to the extent that it is now her full-time mission.

She also describes another way of understanding her purpose as “living awakening” and building “communities of awakening” (A15-A16).\footnote{These terms were borrowed from the Buddhist author, Stephen Batchelor.} These terms emphasise the togetherness of community life and purpose – something enshrined in the concept of \textit{sangha} - rather than the more individualistic pursuit conveyed by the term “service”. Awakening also expresses the idea of not only being awake to the suffering of oneself but also the suffering of the world.

\subsection*{7.3.3 Isaac}

Isaac’s purpose in life is 1) to wake up, and 2) to be of service (I30). Although not well articulated, both of these ideas are closely related to each other and concern being engaged in the world to change oneself and the world. Waking up conveys the idea of understanding the world and one’s place in it in a new light; it is about developing “a more holistic vision of life, the universe and everything” (I30). Waking up is achieved through service and an important element of service is opening oneself up to the wisdom of other people and cultures; it is about doing, sharing and learning together. Service is also about helping people wake up to a better view of themselves and finding them a place in community. Isaac has strived to engage in both these two activities throughout his life. Thus, the core of Isaac’s purpose is concerned with collective learning through Buddhism and other cultural wisdom to transform himself and society.
7.3.4 Kacy

Kacy harbours the desire to gain enlightenment and save all sentient beings - the goals of Tibetan Buddhism - because she has met the Dalai Lama (K11, K3). The Dalai Lama showed her that anything is possible including profound transformation that changes an ordinary human being to “a super human being” (K11). However, she is reluctant to embrace this goal fully just yet because she feels like a novice unprepared for an ambitious project. Rather, a more reachable goal in the here and now is “to be kind and useful” (K11). Being kind means having compassion for others and herself, something the Dalai Lama makes clear as being the essence of the Buddhist path and something he embodies in his activities. Being useful means taking this kindness into servicing other people or what she calls “dharma in practice” (K3, K8). Dharma in practice is about enacting the Buddhist virtues of truth, compassion and mindfulness in the community rather than adhering to the ritualistic aspects.

7.3.5 Quinn

Quinn provides a neat understanding of purpose divided it into two related parts: the purpose of practice and the purpose of worldly life. The purpose of practice was once “to end personal suffering” in accordance with the Four Noble Truths but now has been expanded to include bodhisattva ideals (Q33). This was the result of his association with FWBO whose vows he has taken to heart. These are:

1. To save all beings from difficulties
2. To destroy all spiritual defilements in my own mind and through advice of that of others
3. To learn the dharma in all its aspects, practice it and realise it, and teach it to others
4. In all possible ways help lead all beings in the direction of buddhahood/enlightenment (Q33)

Therefore the purpose of Quinn’s spiritual practice is to eradicate personal suffering and the suffering of others through working on mental defilements, learning the dharma, and in the process help all sentient beings towards realisation of their ultimate potential.

His worldly purpose, fitting comfortably within the purpose of practice, is about “growing consciousness - mine and the communities – [and] raising consciousness through teaching and writing” (Q32). To achieve this, he draws on phenomenology and existentialism because they analytically examine the dominant mode of thinking and allow people to develop a better understanding of themselves in relation to the world:

Phenomenology and existentialism have always been central methodologies/philosophies for me - they're about throwing ‘taken-for-granted’ beliefs and values into sharper relief, developing critical awareness, seeing the ‘whole’ picture, becoming an authentic individual, especially in relation to
contemporary environmental and social issues, which are very similar to Buddhist goals to me. (Q32)

Quinn has attempted to “grow consciousness” through teaching both in tertiary institutions and at the Buddhist centre he runs. However, now in semi-retirements, he wants his voice to be heard through different forms of media which he is actively exploring.

7.3.6 Mia

Mia’s purpose in life is unequivocal:

To reach enlightenment so that I may benefit all sentient beings. (M25)

This is uttered with total conviction and the deepest commitment. It is the reason for everything she does in life and it keeps her honest during uncertainties or difficulties. Tibetan Buddhism has given her this purpose although she believes that she had already sensed it during early childhood (M25-26). It now guides her life.

7.3.7 Uthai

When asked what his purpose in life was, Uthai replied emphatically:

I don’t have any purpose in life, but I have an objective at all times: How do I achieve a harmonious and happy mind? That’s all! (U21)

Uthai’s pragmatism that focuses on momentary happiness without recourse to metaphysical goals is underscored by his refusal to accept the traditional Theravada idea of enlightenment (U21). For him, enlightenment is not something even worth considering let alone grasping because it cannot be proven or tested. Rather, if the mind is harmonious and happy all the time then there is no need for any concept including enlightenment. Hence the purpose of his life is to continue mindful practice because, according to his experience, this clearly produces the desired result of happiness.

7.3.8 Frank

Frank believes that our existence is an inexplicable mystery and therefore the only purpose we can have is to live our lives in the most skilful way (F15). This involves living a life of practice whose essence concerns being happy with oneself while creating happiness for others (F9). As an example of how he derived this thinking, Frank quotes from a Zen master who says:

The purpose of Zen or the purpose of practice is to learn to be less harsh with oneself and to learn to be less harsh with others. (F9-10)
Years of practice have taught him that while the goal of enlightenment sounds lucrative, in the end practice is about dana or giving. Dana enhances the well-being of others and hence the well-being of ourselves because we are intrinsically connected. Dana removes the limited notion of personal aspiration in favour of a celebration of oneness. Dana and all aspects of the practice life become something that resonates making the world a better place. When this is understood, the idea of practice as an individualistic pursuit is abandoned. Rather, as Frank states, “[Y]ou practice ... for everyone” (F10).

Thus, Frank’s purpose can be summed up as living a practice life each and every moment to the best of his ability. By doing so, it may be possible to experience the “complete interdependence of everything” and this may lead to something truly transformative (F10). His Zen approach teaches that it is not necessary to resort to any form of cosmological rendering to assist practice because these merely become a burden that obstruct the reality in front of us:

If we truly practice, then enlightenment, samsara, karma and rebirth will look after themselves. They are concepts, mental constructs. Our work is to live the reality of these things as best we can day by day and moment by moment. Practice is about coming to see the nature of reality, not constructing a more complex philosophy of it. (F27)

7.3.9 Rae

Rae’s purpose in life can be stated simply as:

... to practice dharma to end all this lifetime. (R11)

“To end all” means to end all suffering. This purpose is pure and focused; there are no worldly objectives whatsoever. This is because Rae has seen that all worldly activities involve suffering and indeed even purely existing in his present state is a form of suffering because his mind is unable to gain true freedom (R16). The practice of doo chit that led to the experience of sotapanna has proven to him that suffering can be eliminated and that there is nothing better to do. His conventional roles in life, though carried out responsibly, are seen more as perfunctory than anything else. Practice is his priority.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the notion of happiness and purpose among the participants. With regards to happiness, all participants displayed the ability to delve into its deepest meaning of happiness without much probing. While it is difficult to generalise what constitutes happiness as influenced by Buddhism, one thing is certain from this study: happiness is not the feelings associated with pleasant sensual experiences, attainment of success or getting one’s way. While these feelings might be considered
‘pleasure’ they are viewed as being too ordinary, perhaps even crude, to be termed ‘happiness’. This is because happiness in Buddhism is much more refined and has a delicate nature that requires deep understanding of human existence. In particular, it requires insight into the nature of the mind and the suffering it experiences. Table 7.1 provides a summary of the meaning of happiness in comparison to its conventional, non-Buddhist meaning, and also suggests commonalities among the participants.

Table 7.1: Buddhist notions of happiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Conventional meaning</th>
<th>Buddhist meaning</th>
<th>Strong commonality with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ZARA</td>
<td>• Dependency on material things or other people</td>
<td>• Peace, stillness, tranquillity, calmness, equanimity • Non-dependence of externalities • Confidence • Serenity of being, pervasive of body and mind in daily living</td>
<td>• Abby - equanimity, bodily feel, non-dependence, confidence • Frank – confidence in dealing with difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBY</td>
<td>• Pleasure from sensual experiences e.g. possessions, good food, pleasant experiences</td>
<td>• Deep sense of contentment of the way things are • Being present • Equanimity, less pulled by worldly forces</td>
<td>• Zara – contentment, equanimity &amp; confidence • Kacy – appreciation of simple joys of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAAC</td>
<td>• No reference in text</td>
<td>• Freedom from suffering • Delight, gratitude &amp; letting go • Happiness in action, in community, in giving &amp; sharing</td>
<td>• Some similarities with others but mostly unique emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KACY</td>
<td>• No reference in text</td>
<td>• Contentment in work, less materialistic lifestyle &amp; family life • Contentment in face of adversity • Appreciation for simple joys of life</td>
<td>• Abby – appreciation of simple joys of life • Many others participants - contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUINN</td>
<td>• Pleasure from sensual experiences and consumption • Institutionalised as consumerism and pleasure-seeking activities</td>
<td>• Absence of inner conflict e.g. guilt, self-hatred &amp; excessive self-analysis • Contentment • Tranquility • Sense of unmixed ease • Intense happiness in retreats</td>
<td>• Mia – freedom from conditioning, suffering &amp; inner conflict • Zara &amp; Abby – tranquillity, contentment &amp; equanimity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIA</td>
<td>• Gaining objects or receiving gifts • Socialising with friends</td>
<td>• Absence of negative emotions e.g. anger &amp; self-hatred • Extreme interconnected-ness with others and world • Deep empathy • Freedom</td>
<td>• Quinn – freedom from conditioning, suffering &amp; inner conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Happiness and Purpose

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UTHAI</th>
<th>FRANK</th>
<th>RAE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Positive’ things in life such as gaining material things or money</td>
<td>Seeing dhammachart as duality</td>
<td>‘Good life &amp; good things’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic thinking of success, gain, achievement of goals, targets</td>
<td>Contentment, equanimity</td>
<td>‘Success’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Integrity of mind at every moment through mindfulness</td>
<td>Freedom from suffering</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ultimately enlightenment: beyond happiness &amp; suffering</td>
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</table>

With regards to purpose, all participants showed a strong commitment to the spiritual goals of their tradition (Table 7.2). Mia and Kacy follow Tibetan Buddhism, the ultimate goal of which is to gain enlightenment to benefit sentient beings. However, Mia’s commitment is greater probably because of the more advance level of her practice. Kacy, with less experience, is more cautious preferring to adhere to the achievable goals of kindness and service although these are consistent with achieving the ultimate goal. Both Abby and Isaac are Theravada Buddhists but both have incorporated many ideals from other traditions. Their purpose is greatly wedded in the social milieu so much so that the Theravada pursuit of enlightenment seems to have been relatively marginalised. Quite simply they are cosmopolitan Buddhists and their purpose concerns transforming their view of self and helping others to do the same to make the world a better place – something they call ‘awakening’. In this respect, Quinn is similar because he came to Buddhism through Mahayana Buddhism of Ch’an. However, the fundamental beliefs of Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO) are derived from Theravada Buddhism and so it is not surprising that Quinn is another product of the Mahayana-Theravada marriage. In contrast, the strict Theravada Buddhists, Zara, Uthai and Rae, are all unconcerned with the Mahayana emphasis on saving others (though this does not mean they do not care about others). For these participants, the purpose of their lives is to continue practice at every moment. They hope that this will lead to spiritual growth, happiness and enlightenment. Lastly, Frank provides an understanding of purpose that eliminates the dichotomy between personal salvation of Theravada Buddhism and undiluted altruism of Mahayana Buddhism. For him, practice and giving are synonymous because making oneself better makes the world better, and making the world better enhances personal well-being. For Frank, if one truly understands this inseparability then the purpose of Buddhism cannot be construed as a solitary path but rather something that serves and benefits all.
### Table 7.2: Summary of purpose in life of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Purpose in Life</th>
<th>Purpose derived from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ZARA        | • Spiritual growth through Goenka *vipassana*  
              • Pure mind free of suffering and defilements | • Goenka *vipassana* |
| ABBY        | • Service of all life  
              • Living awakening  
              • Building awakened communities | • Goenka *vipassana*  
              • Engaged Buddhism  
              • Passion for justice  
              • Joanna Macy |
| ISAAC       | • To “wake up”  
              • Service | • Engaged Buddhism  
              • Idea of community |
| KACY        | • Kindness and compassion  
              • Service | • Tibetan Buddhism  
              • Dalai Lama |
| QUINN       | • FWBO goals of spiritual development and saving sentient beings  
              • Raising consciousness in community | • Western Buddhism  
              • FWBO  
              • Environmentalism |
| MIA         | • Enlightenment to benefits sentient beings | • Tibetan Buddhism |
| UTHAI       | • Harmonious mind at all times | • Mindfulness practice of Theravada Buddhism |
| FRANK       | • Life of practice  
              • Giving | • Zen |
| RAE         | • To end personal suffering | • *Doo chit* |
CHAPTER 8:
SITUATING THE FINDINGS WITHIN MEADOWS’ SYSTEMIC PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABILITY

8.1 Introduction

This chapter answers Research Question 4; it discusses the implications of Buddhist worldviews and spiritual techniques on sustainability thinking and practice. Donella Meadows’ systemic pathway to sustainability (Meadows 1999a; b) as outlined in Chapter 2 is utilised to achieve this. The findings from Research Question 1, 2 and 3 as discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are analysed within the framework of this pathway to develop an understanding of how Buddhism can be applied at both theoretical and practical levels in efforts to achieve sustainability.

Meadows’ systemic pathway to sustainability consists of two elements. The first element is the pyramidal framework that describes the meaning of and path to sustainability. The second element is the scheme of leverage points which is used to understand the most powerful ways of change towards sustainability when viewed as a complex system. Both of these elements were examined theoretically in Chapter 2. In this chapter, the pyramidal framework and scheme of leverage points are discussed holistically within the context of the findings of this study to demonstrate their practical relevance.

8.2 Core Properties of Sustainability

This section restates Meadows’ pyramidal framework for sustainability and elaborates on the core properties of sustainability to facilitate analysis.

Meadows’ framework is based on the work of Daly (1973). It conveys the idea that the human economy is situated within a hierarchy, with nature as the foundation and reaching up to human purpose at the top (Meadows 1999a). Hence, nature is referred to as the ultimate means and human purpose as the ultimate ends. In between lie the intermediate ends and the intermediate means, but these are important only in so much as they allow the ultimate means to be translated into the ultimate ends. This view contrasts with the dominant development paradigm where prime importance is given to the economy and everything in it – money, structures, goods and services – with little consideration for the purpose they serve. In the end, for Meadows (1999a:44), “the health of nature and real human well-being” are what really count (stress in original).
It then follows that Meadows’ sustainability framework emphasises the greatest satisfaction of well-being while maintaining the integrity of nature through minimising adverse impact. It is worth reiterating how she states this idea:

The three most basic aggregate measures of sustainable development are the **sufficiency** with which ultimate ends are realized for all people, the **efficiency** with which ultimate means are translated into ultimate ends, and the **sustainability** of use of ultimate means. (Meadows 1999a:45 – stress in original)

While Meadows provides three ‘measures’ of sustainability in the above paragraph, they are, of course, also the **core properties** of sustainability; that is, sustainability concerns a system that is **sufficient** in ultimate ends, **efficient** in converting ultimate means to ultimate ends, and **sustainable** in use of nature. Thus, these terms define the characteristics of sustainability and are discussed below. It should be noted that the term **sustainability** in the above paragraph refers to the sustainability of nature and not **systemic sustainability**, the subject of this thesis, which Meadows refers to by using the now ambiguous term **sustainable development**. Therefore, to avoid confusion, this report refers to the sustainability of nature as **environmental sustainability**.

1. **Sufficiency**

Sufficiency can be determined by answering the question: “Are people well-off, satisfied, happy?” (Meadows 1999a:68). However, sufficiency also includes the notion of equity, that is to say, the objective of sustainability is to satisfy the well-being of the **greatest** number of people. This precludes any development path that leaves a large portion of the world’s population without basic necessities. Sufficiency is defined imbued with justice probably because of Meadows’ egalitarian ideals but also because social inequity is neither a recipe for social and ecological sustainability nor the true well-being of the privileged.

2. **Efficiency**

Efficiency can be determined by answering the question: “Is the most possible well-being achieved with the least possible throughput of material and energy?” (Meadows 1999a:68). It can also be understood as the “efficiency of the translation mechanisms from the bottom to the top of the triangle” (Meadows 1999a:68). In other words, efficiency concerns how well the human economy converts natural resources into well-being that constitutes the ultimate human purpose.

3. **Environmental Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability can be determined by answering the question: “Are the natural systems that support the material and energy throughput healthy, resilient, and full of evolutionary potential?” (Meadows 1999a:68). Hence, environmental sustainability concerns the use of natural resources-
harnessing technologies that are benign or least destructive, in order to maintain the integrity of nature and her services.

In conclusion, the idea of sustainability as embodied in the basic properties of sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability should aim to achieve “the greatest possible ends with the least possible means” (Meadows 1999a:45). To attain this, “good science”, “efficient political and economic systems” together with “a culture that illuminates the higher purposes of life” are imperative (Meadows 1999a:46). How the findings of this study fit within Meadows’ sustainability framework and these properties is discussed next.

8.3 Buddhism and Sustainability

Meadows’ sustainability framework utilises the idea of capital to conceptualise the components in sustainability and their dynamic relationship with each other. The resulting depiction includes all forms of capital, namely, natural, built, social and human capital, which sit under well-being in the pyramid (Figure 2.5). Sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability – the core properties of sustainability – are dependent on the amount, use and balance of these capitals in the system.

This section interprets the findings of this study within this framework, thereby demonstrating how the concepts apply practically to help achieve sustainability and, at the same time, highlighting Buddhism’s contributions. The interpretation analyses the contribution of Buddhism to each form of capital (except built capital1) and well-being using examples provided by the participants, together with a discussion on the implication for sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability.

8.3.1 Natural Capital (Ultimate Means)

Natural capital is defined systemically as “the stocks and flows in nature from which the human economy takes its materials and energy (sources) and to which we throw those materials and energy when we are done with them (sinks)” (Meadows 1999a:47). Natural capital is the base of the Daly pyramid and provides the ultimate means in sustainability. In contrast, environmental sustainability, a core property of systemic sustainability, is concerned with maintaining the quantity and quality of natural capital to allow satisfaction of well-being. It can only be achieved through good science which sustains natural capital. In others words, natural capital is the instrument of sustainability while environmental sustainability is the process of taking care of that instrument.

1 Built capital is omitted because Buddhism does not deal directly with factories, tools, machines or infrastructure, or their production.
This study did not focus directly on the contribution of the nine participants to natural capital or environmental sustainability. That is to say, this study’s primary aim was not to investigate the impact of Buddhism on environmental behaviour or use of technologies. Rather, the aim was to investigate Buddhism’s potential for instigating radical change towards sustainability within a systems perspective. Nevertheless, some general principles were found that support the protection of natural capital. These are: respect for life, frugality and moderation, and forgoing consumption. These are discussed next.

1. Respect for life is a fundamental part of Buddhism and fosters an attitude conducive to natural capital preservation.

Respect for life is enshrined in the first precept of non-killing and it also reflected in the compassion ideal. Therefore Buddhists strive to abstain from harming living things while helping those in need. Ideas such as karma and the potential of all beings for Buddhahood also support this thinking. Since all participants endeavour to uphold the first precept they can be regarded as having respect for life. This means they avoid direct killing but many also avoid indirect killing (e.g. eating meat, pest control in the house). Of the nine participants Mia, a Tibetan Buddhist and environmentalist, shows the most abhorrence for killing. She believes that animals are similar to humans in that they have feelings and experience love and pain. She uses the example of a duck, describing it like a person, and shows disbelief at how it could be viewed as food:

> I was watching a duck one day walk and I was just thinking, “How can people look at them and think it’s food!” It’s a being. It’s interacting with its children. It’s a mother. It’s a wife! Like I just had this whole realisation about this duck and I thought, “How can we eat it?” (M36)

However, for most participants the stance on vegetarianism is unclear since Buddhism does not stipulate it. Perhaps, Buddhism gives them a predisposition for vegetarianism. More likely, the participants in this study do not adhere to rigid definitions of what is ‘right’. Rather, as Kacy tells us, behaviour should be based on the idea of doing “the least harm” (K28) and avoiding killing that is heedless or unnecessary. Nevertheless, despite leeway, respect for life is something that runs strongly in Buddhism and it is argued here that respect for life is fundamental to the preservation of natural capital because without it the relationship with nature will be utilitarian, and the human heart cannot sustain utilitarianism for long.

2. Frugality and moderation are Buddhist traits that contribute to environmental sustainability.

Frugality and moderation have always been characteristics of Buddhism since the time of the Buddha. Although this subject was not explored in detail, the experience with each participant suggests that

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2 Some Buddhist traditions do stipulate vegetarianism especially for monks. However, it is much less strict for laypeople.
frugality and moderation are common traits. An example is Isaac. He lives in a recycled house that was moved from another location and rebuilt. As for building the new monastery, Isaac explains that his project will be the opposite of extravagance because Buddhism is about achieving the maximum good with the least means:

And with this monastery and, as soon as you say the word, a lot of people start to think of things with gold leaf everywhere and whatever. And so, no! No! What do we need to accomplish the purpose? … How can we make the best quality, cheapest kuti [monk hut] you can make? … We can't eat the earth. It’s like part of the practice to think like this. What’s the minimum requirement? (I26)

Similarly, Kacy displays contentment choosing to live simply and quietly during the festive season, an act that runs counter to the mainstream:

Life is calm and peaceful here; the last two weeks, Christmas time, in Australia are [sic] a time for mass consumerism, over indulgence and over consumption. We just try and have a happy family time and ignore all the rest. (K37)

Even Uthai, probably the wealthiest person in the group, appears very modest. He enjoys a simple lifestyle with his wife, occasionally giving dharma talks (U31). Despite being a major shareholder in one of Thailand’s largest food businesses, his discrete and inconspicuous lifestyle contrasts markedly with that of the rich in Thailand.

3. Forgoing consumption is an instrument that can teach simplicity and lessen the demand on natural capital.

Forgoing consumption has been a hallmark of Buddhism since the earliest times. Forgoing consumption helps us understand what constitute true necessities for human fulfillment. Frank provides two examples of the Buddhist practice of forgoing consumption and the lessons that can be learnt. Firstly, there is the Zen practice where one stops doing, having or using something that has become a habit, for one week (F23). This might be anything from reading, listening to the radio or eating a certain food. As Frank explains, the objective is to study the pattern of behaviour that has become routinised in our life and to see how attached we are to them. When we do so, we experience ‘wanting’ and ‘craving’ at first, but soon get used to it. Eventually, we realise that “no habit is unchangeable, that the absence of something is fine. You can live with the absence of simple things” (F23). Thus, this practice of forgoing things could be useful for changing behaviour which are often unnecessary but synonymous with modern life, but which collectively are very destructive of natural capital. Secondly, Frank refers to the undertaking of Zen retreats lasting seven or more days. In these retreats, there is silence and the practitioner sits hours of meditation, eats simple meals and cannot access any entertainment (F24) - the opposite of a materialistic lifestyle. However, after getting through the first few days, the practitioner
often starts enjoying the retreat and by the end may not want it to end. As Frank summarises, this provides a valuable lesson for us:

> It’s one of the things you learn from the retreat, is that human happiness has very little to do with possessions and objects and entertainment. It has everything to do with one’s personal inner world. And provided that there is a certain level of human comfort: you have shelter, you have a reasonably comfortable bed, you have adequate food and you have practice then, yes, that’s a very rich life. (F25)

Buddhist retreats can provide compelling evidence that a non-materialistic life is possible and that happiness, or perhaps greater happiness, can be attained living a life of simplicity and one that takes very little from nature. Forgoing consumption is a useful instrument for achieving sustainability.

### 8.3.2 Human Capital (Intermediate Means/Ends)

According to Meadow’s, human capital can be defined as the stock of people and their attributes (Meadows 1999a). The stock of people is measured as the population and its rate of change. Key attributes of the population include health and education. These attributes are regarded as intermediate ends as well as an intermediate means; that is to say, they are something to be desired on their own as well as being important in the production of other forms of capital. For example, good health is desirable in its own right but also necessary for production of economic goods and helpful in achieving happiness. Education is similar in this respect. Thus, compared to built capital, Meadows (1999a:59) asserts that “human capital probably delivers more well-being for less money, less built capital, and less material and energy throughput than any other investment”. Investing in human capital is an effective move towards sustainability because it directly contributes to well-being and catalyses the formation of other forms of capital. Buddhism can enhance human capital in several ways according to the findings of this study.

1. **Buddhism contributes to population by helping to sustain lives.**

It is hard to assess the impact of Buddhism on population because population is a vast, multi-faceted and culturally bound issue. Nevertheless, at the most fundamental level, the findings of this study suggest that Buddhism helps sustain people’s lives, and thus maintain population. The concept of personal sustainability is used to explain how this is achieved.

One of the participants, Quinn, makes a valuable contribution on the subject. He notes that youth suicide rates in ‘developed’ countries are among the highest in the world. This is an indication of underlying problems especially spiritual voidness and lack of self-fulfillment, as he writes:

> To commit suicide is the opposite of sustaining the self! The reasons for it amongst the young (and old) are of course complex. The issue of inner impoverishment mentioned
in the last couple of articles is undoubtedly one of the factors involved. We've spoken of how a materialistic, consumerist society encourages an external form of pleasure-seeking, which in turn leads to a neglect of the inner world. Sooner or later the pleasure seeking becomes stale and leads nowhere. When it does people have nothing to fall back on, nothing inside to sustain themselves. (Q46)

So the notion of personal sustainability suggests that Buddhism contributes to sustaining the population by providing both an inner foundation for people “to fall back on” and a sense of purpose to continue a meaningful life. Zara is a good example of this as described in Section 5.3.2. During her youth she had everything she wanted and led a hedonistic life. However, it became obvious that this was neither fulfilling nor sustainable. She decided then that if she did not find anything worthwhile in life she was going to “burn out with drugs and alcohol” (Z16). Thus, this is one clear example where Buddhism intervened and may well have helped sustained the life of a person.

2. Buddhism shifts the emphasis from quantity to quality, thus improving efficiency.

Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that does not stress the need to procreate. In fact, at the most dedicated level of monkhood, celibacy is stipulated because sexual interaction is regarded as a barrier to ultimate well-being. This is an important point because many other spiritual and materialist traditions enshrine procreation as the essence of what it is to be human – explicitly or implicitly. Unfortunately, merely increasing the population without pondering the consequences is arguably very destructive of sustainability at the present juncture in history. For Buddhism, the emphasis is on the quality not quantity of human beings.

The notion of personal sustainability underscores Buddhism’s emphasis on quality of existence, especially at the psychological level. Personal sustainability concerns overcoming negative conditions that make life intolerable or not worthwhile. The findings in this study demonstrate that Buddhism can play a dramatic role in this area and, hence, improve people’s lives (as documented for each participant in Chapter 5). Personal sustainability increases efficiency by removing the barriers that prevent the satisfaction of well-being; it makes it easier for well-being to be achieved. Some examples include Mia, who indulged in overeating to distract herself from pain (M4), and Quinn, who equated alcohol with happiness (Q13). This type of ‘protective’ action wastes material resource and destroys health while not satisfying well-being; in other words, it is very inefficient at generating sustainability. Thus, personal sustainability is a move towards satisfying non-material needs non-materially and material needs materially. Personal sustainability helps participants come to term with their non-material needs and provides them with the tools to fulfill them.
3. **Buddhism can improve health and thereby contributes to efficiency.**

Health forms a key basis for well-being. Health is desirable because humans rely on health for social production and attainment of happiness. It can be argued that anything that improves health directly enhances the ability to achieve well-being.\(^3\)

The findings in this study indicate that Buddhism contributes greatly to the mental health of the participants. Since physical health is intimately related to mental health, Buddhism can be said to have a beneficial impact on the participants’ overall health. Kacy is a case in point. Kacy suffered severe mental problems as a result of menopause, a physical problem. Buddhism was one of the most important means of coping with the trauma as described in Section 5.3.8. Other examples include Zara, Frank, Rae and Uthai, all of whom demonstrated remarkable poise in coping with stress, a key health issue of modern society. In Zara’s case, *vipassana* healed her chest problems during her first retreat, and then, many years later, allowed her to cope effectively and maintain the integrity of her family while her husband faced a tribunal. In Frank, Rae and Uthai cases, it was about managing difficult situations in the workplace. Buddhism transformed the way these participants work and has reduced their stress level to a minimum. Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, Buddhism has had a considerable impact on the overall health of the participants in this study. Buddhism can be considered a much cheaper and more efficient alternative (compared to, for example, hospital visits and pharmaceutical drugs) to enhancing health and well-being.

4. **Buddhism expands what constitutes education to include inner education.**

Buddhism has no direct impact on education as normally understood since it is not concerned with traditional subjects in education. However, the study of ourselves especially the working of our mind and how we understand the world can also be regarded as education – inner education. Unfortunately, this part of learning has been severely neglected by formal educational practices to the extent that, as Quinn notes, “… we have lost the skills of how to enter within ourselves, to communicate within and to engage within” (Q46). This has resulted in the inability to train our minds and manage our emotions with disastrous results for individuals, families and societies. The disastrous results are well documented in this study especially in the stories of Quinn and Mia. However, Quinn, Mia as well as all of the other participants were able to overcome negative conditionings or events using Buddhist theory and practice. They were able to get to know themselves and know the causes and consequences associated with the working of their mind. Through Buddhism, the participants were able to make peace with themselves leading to greater personal mastery. This is the contribution of Buddhism to

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\(^3\) Although this does not mean that one cannot be happy without health, it is generally more difficult for most people. However, at the ultimate level of Buddhist practice, health becomes virtually irrelevant to well-being when the mind is fully unattached to the body.
human capital: it expands the idea of what constitutes education to include inner education. Buddhism has made the participants realised that the internal and external worlds are inseparable: what one does and think is dependent on how one’s mind works, and to be able to see this is transformative.

5. **Buddhism enhances efficiency through inner education.**

Inner education provides the contemplative skills to understand the nature of true well-being. This is essential to sustainability because external education (with the possible exception of philosophy and psychology) does not directly address most issues in well-being. On the contrary, external education attempts to furnish students with ‘knowledge’ necessary to generate economic output but often at the expense of happiness. Buddhism restores the balance in education to include well-being. Restoration of this balance enhances efficiency because people can focus more on achieving well-being as oppose to dedicating a disproportionate amount of time to work that usually has little to do with well-being. This is why one proposed measure of efficiency and human capital is the amount of healthy time people have for learning, leisure⁴ and community work (Meadows 1999a:59). If this measure is correct, then the participants in this study should be candidates for people with the highest scores. All participants in this study have an abundance of time. In fact, every participant has made the choice to remove himself or herself from mainstream thinking that makes time scarce. Instead, they have embraced personal agendas for giving, teaching, social change and mental development. The participants’ lives can be characterised by a much slower tempo that bodes well for a more thoughtful existence and the build up of human capital.

6. **Efficiency and human capital rise when positive human qualities flourish.**

Buddhism helps people develop qualities conducive to their own well-being and the well-being of society. This is achieved through getting to know oneself, a fundamental part of inner education. Getting to know oneself is not unlike learning a conventional subject, for example, geography. Geography is the study of people and places (O'Riordan 1989). The study of geography allows us to expand our horizon to include other cultures and civilizations, thus expanding how we view ourselves within humanity. Lack of understanding of geography can lead to self-centredness, isolationism and xenophobia (Fien & Gerber 1988). The same can be said of Buddhism. Observing the working of our mind allows us to expand our understanding of the nature of human beings and appreciate that all human beings are alike in their needs, wants and desires. In short, despite superficial differences, we share a common humanity. This leads to qualities such as empathy and compassion which are important to all facets of human capital such as health, the ability to learn, and the ability to interact

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⁴ Leisure includes psychological maintenance and spiritual development as well as entertainment, sports and building relationships.
productively with others, as well as being desirable in themselves as personal traits. Qualities such as compassion and empathy can reverberate through a system, for example, by setting inspirational examples to friends, family and the community. Because they enhance a person’s ability to have meaningful relationships, these qualities increase the efficacy of social capital formation; for example, when people are compassionate, trust, norms and networks can be established more easily as oppose to when people are hateful and self-centred. The findings in this study clearly demonstrate the development of empathy and compassion among the participants as they became acquainted with their inner selves. Examples include Isaac as a teacher and community builder, Abby as a much more empathetic activist, Mia as a compassionate member of society, and Rae as a less abrasive university lecturer. These examples are consistent with Buddhism’s assertion that human qualities can be developed. A quality such as compassion should be regarded not as something one is endowed with from birth but as something that can be acquired through training: the more compassion one practices, the more compassionate one becomes. This is a form of education. It is true learning. Buddhism can provide a significant contribution to the development of these qualities and hence the improvement in human capital and efficiency.

7. Buddhism necessitates the conditions that help ensure that human capital creates efficiency and not the opposite.

Buddhism sets the conditions that reduce the chances of human capital resulting in even more conspicuous consumption, as is the case in many rich countries. This is because Buddhism provides the ethics to direct behaviour and guide the use of external education and health. Buddhism then grounds this ethics through experiential practices of inner education. The combination of ethics and its grounding establishes general constraints on actions that curb excesses and harmful behaviour while encouraging the satisfaction of true well-being rather than pseudo-well-being. As such, Buddhism sets boundaries that can help galvanise human capital towards efficiency when health and education rise. It also contributes to sufficiency when paired with the development of inner qualities because justice and equity is more likely to be achieved when people are ethical and compassionate.

8.3.3 Social Capital (Intermediate Ends)

Social capital is an intermediate end in Meadow’s sustainability scheme. Meadows (1999a:61) defines social capital as “a stock of attributes (knowledge, trust, efficiency, honesty) that inheres not to a single individual, but to the human collectivity”. Similarly, Putnam (2000:19) refers to social capital as

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5 In *Human Scale Development*, Max-Neef (1991) provides examples of ‘pseudo-satisfiers’ that appear to satisfy basic needs but can actually undermine them, for example, brand-name products that appear to satisfy the need for identity but are actually part of corporate manipulation strategies.
“connections among people – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”, and is something akin to “civic virtues”. He divides social capital into two types: ‘bonding’ capital that strengthens bonds within a group and ‘bridging’ capital that reaches out to diverse individuals or networks (Putnam 2000:22).

Social capital is vital to efficiency and sufficiency. This is because social capital is potentially “a high-leverage transformative factor in the process of channeling ultimate means into ultimate ends” (Meadows 1999a:64). Social capital can facilitate new social structures that generate huge efficiency gains and also improve sufficiency by being more inclusive within the population. Investing in social capital is a key to sustainability because it can ease the difficult process of change by uniting people to rise up to challenges and by reducing the risk of conflict.

The analysis below concentrates on the Buddhist contribution to the formation of social capital relating to trust, norms and networks.

1. **Buddhism encourages trust through truth.**

Trust is crucial to social capital. Trust is important to sufficiency and efficiency. This is because trust lubricates the whole of society and lessens the cost of social interactions. Trust is dependent on truth; that is to say, it is dependent on the quality of information available between people and in society. As Meadows (1999a) argues, one way of understanding trust is as something that decreases by the telling of lies and increases by the telling of truth.

Truth is an important part of all the participants’ lives because Buddhism encourages everyone to be, as Kacy puts it, “very scrupulous about telling the truth” (K30). In reality, the Buddhist idea of truth is not about telling the truth per se. Rather, it is about being thoughtful with what one says and understanding the motivation behind it. For example, Kacy describes a situation where it would be imperative not to tell the truth:

… if somebody is about to be killed and they’re running away and you see them go down that way and then the next thing the guys with the guns come along, you’re not going to say he went that way. You just say, “I don’t know,” or something like that, because telling the truth will cause harm to them. (K18)

Similarly, Rae points out that he still ‘lies’ frequently to his child but his intention is to provide care, not to harm:

I still lie to my son but my motivation for doing so is to stop him from doing certain things. Like if he is very naughty and wants to go outside at night and so I say to him, “There are tigers outside.” This is clearly a lie but I just say it matter-of-factly but it’s not lying to get rich, get praise or gain face, or even to get myself of the hook for something wrong I committed. (R20)
Situating the Findings within Meadows’ Systemic Pathway to Sustainability

Hence, truth is about the underlying motivation and whether that motivation is care for the well-being of others. To put it another way, truth is about skilful speech which is speech that is not only truthful but also “useful, affectionate and promoting concord” (Quinn, Q24). The emphasis is whether the speech contributes positively or negatively to the situation and the people involved.

Another aspect of truth concerns projecting self-image. As Frank states, most human beings need to project a self-identity or self-image but it is very hard to be completely honest in what one is projecting (F19). Inevitably, the tendency is to project something that is slightly misleading or that maintains a certain appearance because this benefits the individual in some way. Unfortunately, doing so can be considered a form of lying. Projecting an image can be a way of hiding the truth and, without care, can be harmful. This is especially true for those with power, for example, political leaders and teachers. As Isaac points out, it is all too easy to create an image and use it as a tool to manipulate others in order to gain power for oneself, and this becomes destructive of truth and trust (I24). Hence, Quinn tells us through his own example that one must constantly check back on one’s real motivation when others bestow trust on us:

    .... I will often say to myself: “Now be absolutely sure you’re not doing this for egotistical reasons, to seem like a clever teacher. You’ve come here to help people.”
    (Q22)

Doing so reduces the chance of harmful action.

The last aspect of truth concerns telling the truth about the world and the need for change that people may not be aware of. Isaac is one of the strongest proponents of this interpretation because of his strong engaged stance. He suggests that skilful speech is as much about raising awareness on social and environmental issues as it is about living a pure life (I20, I25). To neglect speaking out about these issues when one is aware of them is equivalent to “complicity and denial” and is not Right Speech because it is irresponsible and perpetuates structural ignorance (I19, I25). However, Isaac stresses that speaking out should not be done with arrogance or through tactics of shaming people. Rather, he believes that propounding truth must only be done out of kindness. This is the only way that truth can be part of Right Speech.

2. Buddhism establishes norms conducive to social capital and sustainability.

The norms of a society make up a key component of social capital. Norms are the means and ways of doing things that are universally accepted in a culture. One way of understanding norms is as shared knowledge and wisdom which are developed and become ingrained in a society over time. They

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6 The idea of norms as articulated here is distilled from the works of Putnam (2000, 1993), Meadows (1999a) and other authors in the vast literature of social capital. Ideas from the findings of this study have also been added.
facilitate efficiency through lowering the barriers to cooperation. They also promote sufficiency when founded on other essential ingredients of social capital of truth, trust and reciprocity and human qualities such as compassion and empathy.

The findings in this study indicate that the ethics of Buddhism – known as sila or the precepts – plays a significant role in setting the norms of behaviour for the participants. It is argued here that these norms are conducive to the formation of social capital and contribute to sufficiency because they are founded on the aspiration for the true well-being of all.

Although there are larger schemes depending on the tradition, Buddhist ethics at the basic level consists of five precepts. These are expressed traditionally as:

1. To abstain from killing any living being
2. To abstain from taking what is not given
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicants causing carelessness

(Phra Medhidhammaporn 1994:28)

These precepts are considered fundamental norms for behaviour in daily life of lay people. They are regarded as the foundation of well-being for individuals and society. Hence Buddhism encourages its followers to uphold these precepts to the best of their abilities. The participants in this study demonstrate the importance of the precepts in their lives. Some of the most notable interpretations include those of Quinn, Isaac and Frank and these are described below to highlight the contribution to social capital.

Quinn

Quinn takes the precepts everyday as a member of the FWBO. To Quinn, the precepts are “training principles” rather than strict commandments; they promote skilful action in life rather than demand obedience (Q20). To help understand the intention behind these precepts, Quinn also takes the precepts’ positive qualities immediately after the traditional vows:

With deeds of loving-kindness, I purify my body.
With open-handed generosity, I purify my body.
With stillness, simplicity and contentment, I purify my body.
With skilful communication, I purify my speech.

These are the Theravada lay precepts which I believe can represent the basic principles behind all precept schemes.
With mindfulness clear and radiant, I purify my mind. (Q21)

Hence, the precepts expressed in this way are ideals of how one should lead life. As an example, he describes how stillness, simplicity and contentment is something that can be applied in all things related to desire including sex and alcohol (Q21). However, he emphasises that the idea is to make consistent effort rather than perfect adherence, the latter being impossible for ordinary people in any case (Q24). This is why the precepts are “training principles” because they are crucial to the development of self and the development of relationships with others.

Quinn believes his Buddhist tradition, Western Buddhism, is extremely supportive of extending the precepts to wider social and environmental contexts. Quinn cites the examples of Western Buddhism being against the cattle industry, against supermarket chains that sell meat and against women buying fur coats because these involve animal cruelty and are detrimental to the environment (Q22). This allows Western Buddhists to express their ethics in many ways, for example, through shopping behaviour. Right Livelihood, a component of the Eightfold Path, is also another way of expressing Buddhist ethics. Right Livelihood encourages practitioners to choose a livelihood that is ethical. For Quinn, he has chosen to become an environmental educator so that he can help people grow (Q22). This he believes is a very ethical form of work. As he summarises, Buddhist ethics is strongly connected with what one does in life and how it affects others:

To me, if you are helping society by raising that level of consciousness then that’s ethical. It’s a broader definition of the Buddhist ethics. I guess it’s generosity and mental clarity. (Q23)

Isaac

Isaac adds another dimension to the understanding of Buddhist ethics or sila. This is how he explains it:

So I’d look at the meanings of the word and what the sila is … It means having a reliable, subjective basis for action. It is an internal quality close to conscience, I suppose. I think the Thai word is karom which means ‘that which directs your outward flowing energy’. So like it’s getting yourself aligned. (Q19-Q20)

For Isaac, sila is the source of personal conduct, a guide to behaviour. It is also interesting to note that Isaac likens sila to conscience, something that closely relates to civic virtues as put forward by Putnam (2000) in his description of social capital. Conscience inheres in the individual but civic virtues can be regarded as collective conscience. Sila also concerns alignment, but one might ask what that alignment is to? The answer lies in Isaac’s belief that the key Buddhist teachings including the precepts are “reality statements” meaning that they are most conducive to well-being, harmony and enlightenment (I11). Therefore sila allows transformation of people by establishing new patterns of behaviour that are less destructive. Sila creates consistency between internal purpose and outwardly behaviour.
Isaac also concurs with Quinn for the need to broaden the interpretation of *sila* beyond personal deeds. He stresses the need to apply every precept structurally because we are intrinsically part of the world and its economic structure (I18). To pretend otherwise is to be a moralist and avoid responsibility to others especially those less fortunate. Isaac uses the first and fifth precepts as examples.

The first precept traditionally is interpreted to mean refraining from taking lives, but Isaac riles against its narrow application because of the present situation of mass extinction:

> You prattle on about not hurting an insect and then 60% of the species is lost in Australia and billions of people killed. (I20)

To avoid being hypocritical, anyone observing the first precept should speak out when appropriate and help in whatever ways possible to save what remains of nature.

With regards to the fifth precept, Isaac states that the overuse of petrol, gold, plutonium and many other refined substances goes against the precept (I18). Our present addiction to them is just as catastrophic as addiction to drugs and alcohol. Addiction to these refined substances should be viewed as breaking the precepts in exactly the same way as taking drugs or alcohol. Buddhists who take the fifth precept should therefore consider what action they can take to lessen the use of these substances and their impact on the environment.

In conclusion, Isaac believes that the precepts should be considered in the context of whether any action is at the expense of other people and the environment (I18). He quotes a saying from Rabbi Hillel the Elder to sum up his thinking:

> If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am for myself only, what am I? If not now, when? (I20)

Action guided by the precepts should always concern personal well-being *and* the well-being of others. The personal and the structural are inseparable because our world faces enormous problems which we all wittingly or unwittingly contribute to.

**Frank**

Frank regards *sila* as the “perfection of conduct” (F16). However, perfection is impossible to attain because it requires perfect adherence to the precepts. Frank asserts that perfect adherence means adherence at the level of thoughts; that is to say, just one negative thought breaks the precepts. If we understand this then we understand that we break the precepts all the time. Thus, for Frank, the precepts become something that helps us grow and modify even the subtlest of behaviour over time.
Frank also views the precepts as starting points for exploration of ethics rather than “prescriptive” laws (F20). He gives the example of sexual misconduct, the third precept. Drawing from the work of Zen teacher Robert Aitken, Frank believes that sexual misconduct concerns the misuse of sex and the harmful use of sex. However, this raises many difficult questions beginning with what is misuse of sex and what is harmful sexual behaviour? It also opens the arena to wider issues in sexuality, for example, heterosexuality versus homosexuality. These questions have no fixed answers. Rather, they must be explored in real life and that exploration is an essential part of the liberal Zen approach to the precepts that Frank subscribes to.

Finally, Frank acknowledges that tension is always present when grappling with the precepts. For example, he admits that he cannot live up to the ideals of the first precept. He explains that “To live is to kill” meaning that it is impossible not to take the lives of other beings while leading an ordinary life (F18). As examples, he informs us that he still eats meat, fumigates the house and steps on ants even if inadvertently. All these activities mean he is responsible for killing. However, Frank regards this tension as part of practice. He is confident that, in the end, practice will provide resolution. In fact, Frank regards the precepts as falling within the realm of practice. Quoting from a Zen text by Hakuin Zenji, he says, “The many paramittas all have their source in zazen. The many perfections all have their source in zazen” (F16). This means all the perfections, *sila* that includes the precepts being one of them, stem from sitting meditation, or *zazen*. In the end, while the precepts can be subjected to intense analysis, it is practice that truly represents the way of Buddhism and practice will eventually provide the deepest insight into ethics.

Quinn, Isaac and Frank provide examples of interpretations of Buddhist ethics. They also demonstrate how Buddhist ethics has a normative impact on individual behaviour. However, this normative impact is more like a process that both broadens and becomes more refined as the practitioner’s understanding deepens. This is because Buddhist ethics is a voluntary, liberal training tool founded on the principles of long-term individual development that is simultaneously committed to social well-being. Buddhist ethics also exists in the context of other principles such as Right Livelihood and Right Speech, and, of course, practice. This makes it very effective and easily applicable in life.

The application of each precept as norms would have profound implications on the social capital and sustainability of any society. Should a society refrain from killing, peace and environmental improvement would be the instant result. Should a society refrain from stealing, violence and conflict would plummet. Should a society refrain from sexual misconduct, family suffering would decline dramatically. Should a society refrain from propagating lies, the level of trust would soar. Should a
society refrain from intoxicants, physical and mental health would improve and crime reduced. These are the indisputable impact of accepting the precepts as norms in society. Their power can be dramatic and subtle, broad and narrow in scope. The impact on social capital would be immense.

**3. Buddhism strengthens networks.**

The strength of social networks plays an important role in the formation of social capital. This is because social networks foster cohesion as well as trust, norms and reciprocity. Hence one measure of social capital is the “density or frequency or intensity of human relationships” (Meadows 1999a:62). Similar to norms and trust, networks contribute to efficiency because group resources can be accessed easier, and to sufficiency because networks facilitate transfer of information and greater understanding between people.

Drawing from the experience of the participants in this study, the contribution of Buddhism to social networks is explored. The spheres of social networks discussed in this context are: family, work and community.

**Family**

According to Coleman (1988:S110), “the social capital of the family is the relations between children and parents (and, when families include other members, relationships with them as well)”. The findings of this study suggest that Buddhism contributes greatly to family cohesion and hence, social capital. Buddhism has assisted the participants in bonding with family members and repairing damaged relationships. The impact is significant for all participants. The examples of Abby, Isaac, Zara, Mia and Uthai are given.

Abby and Isaac are growing old together despite considerable personality and cultural differences. Buddhism has been an important part in allowing this to happen. For Abby, Buddhism has been instrumental to greater equanimity (A5). This means she is able to choose the most appropriate action when dealing with Isaac rather than purely reacting to a situation. For Isaac, Buddhism has helped curb his sometime excessive energy, passion and spontaneity as well as any negative personal tendencies (I23). The Buddhist virtues of mindfulness and patience have been vital to Isaac’s progress. Because both Isaac and Abby have been willing to work on themselves, they have managed to grow wiser together in marriage.

Zara’s family life is happy and complete. Buddhism has enabled her to protect her family during crises, such as when her husband faced a public tribunal (Z9). Buddhism has been crucial in maintaining a loving, equanimous relationship with her children (Z12). Buddhism has also been the foundation for
sharing joy with her parents and brothers, and appreciating them for who they are (Z16). In short, Buddhism has played a major role in maintaining the well-being of Zara’s family.

Mia’s family life has benefited greatly from Buddhism. Firstly, Mia’s relationship with her son is better than ever. This has resulted from Mia working on her anger and successfully purging it from most of her life. She is now able to relate to her son productively with loving care and maturity (M14). Secondly, Mia has improved the relationship with her father, who abused her during childhood, and with her mother, an alcoholic. Buddhism has allowed her to understand her father’s psychological scars and relate to him with composure and compassion (M18-19, M17). This has brought some normality to their relationship, a major step in what has been a turbulent past. With her mother, Mia has learnt to put away resentment of how she was treated as a child (M20). This has lead her to accepting her mother for who she is:

… what I discovered in the last few weeks was that my compassion could be bigger than my judgment, and I could love her even if she was the way she was … And then I really went, “I can accept her the way she is, and her choices, and I just will love her.” (M20)

Mia’s willingness to remove judgement, develop empathy and cultivate kindness has allowed her to come to turn with the past and be at peace with the present. She has stopped the blaming game and focused on herself. Thus, her family life has transformed with the practice of Buddhism.

Uthai’s family life can be described as very secure. It lacks drama. However, Uthai has always sought this. When he married Pim, their relationship began with an overt acceptance of the law of duality, the understanding that what one wishes most one must also experience the opposite (U20-21). Thus, Uthai and Pim began their marriage shunning extremes such as emotional exuberance or romance. Instead, they began with the idea of friendship and this has been the foundation of their relationship to this day, as Uthai recalls:

I told my wife several times, “Let’s be friends.” So we didn’t seek anything great. So because we didn’t seek there was nothing much that could come back and harm us. It really is like that. You have to understand the way things are. (U21)

Uthai’s marriage is grounded in the dharma and its path of moderation, and this has protected them from the vagaries of life. It has allowed them to maintain a life of peace as spiritual friends for over thirty years.

Work
Work is an important place for networking that contributes to social capital (Putnam 2000). Again Buddhism has played an important role in the participants’ lives in this area. The examples of Frank, Rae and Kacy are given below to illustrate.
Frank provides an example of how Buddhism can improve human relationships. He explains that often there are some individuals, perhaps because of their personality or inclinations, whom one finds awkward to work with. This is the case everywhere in the workplace. However, practice can help the situation if one is prepared to look honestly into one’s own thoughts and behaviour. He advises:

…. you need to examine your own behaviour. You need to examine your own reactions to that person. You need then to start to explore that relationship, which means sometime putting yourself into a situation with that person where you have to engage with them. And it will bring up all sorts of stuff, all sorts of reactions. You may not enjoy it but you’ll learn from it. And if you practice with it then there is some potential for that relationship to be improved. (F22)

Frank has chosen to practice with these ‘difficult’ people on a few occasions. He states that sometimes there have been improvements and sometimes there have not (F23). This is because success is as much dependent on his behaviour as on the openness to engage of the other party. However, the potential is always there. Hence, Buddhist practice provides the possibilities for improvement in human relationship in the workplace - or anywhere else - where one encounters differences in personality, opinion or culture.

Rae provides an example of how his relationship with his work colleagues has improved because of Buddhism. During his earlier years without Buddhist practice he was always fighting for change but his blunt style did not endear him to others. Rae, though, never cared much such was his ego. However, Buddhism has made him understand the nature of his mind and that all human minds are alike: they seek happiness and are controlled by various forces of desire. He now understands that the suffering he inflicted on himself and others was unnecessary. Thus, his approach to work and ‘getting things done’ has changed considerably. It is now more subtle, less combative and within the confines of his responsibilities. The personal change Buddhism has brought and the associated adjustment in attitude have contributed to a more harmonious relationship with his colleagues.

Kacy has proven that work can be humane and compassionate. Through the Ten Enlightened Business Principles, she managed to steer her business towards ethical responsibility for both her employees and society. Her treatment of employees was based on compassion; Kacy was always concerned with the welfare of her staff and endeavoured to make their lives better (K37). This is an exemplar of social capital building because it strengthens the bond between individuals in an area of life where they often spend the most time. Kacy achievements demonstrate that running a business does not require a culture of intense competition or win-lose mentality. Rather, businesses can be a place where trust and reciprocity can develop.
Community participation and activism is an important way of strengthening social networks (Putnam 1993; 2000). Buddhism has made a substantial impact on the extent and way the participants in this study participate. The examples of Rae, Isaac, Quinn, Mia and Abby are provided below.

Rae’s involvement in the community beyond his work has always been minimal. He is a private and solitary person who prefers to live quietly. Nevertheless, Buddhism’s impact that has virtually eradicated most suffering from Rae’s life has driven him to write several books and disseminate them freely. These books are very simple to read but contain the essence of the practice of *doo chit*; they articulate the core ideas to the general public. Many tens of thousands of copies have been distributed and this has been beneficial in introducing Buddhist practice – now increasingly hard to find despite the ubiquity of temples – to Thai people. These books assist people to help themselves and encourage them to seek and, thus, expand practice communities all over the country.  

Isaac and Quinn both are community builders. This is part of their calling. Buddhism has given this calling further impetus and a conceptual platform. Isaac teaches to groups of diverse individuals using the concept of ‘meditation and conversation’ (I10). The philosophy behind this concept is social learning. Thus, Isaac brings people together to share experiences through an egalitarian approach that emphasises dialogue. This is Isaac’s way of building a lay *sangha* or community. In this way, he is able to help alleviate suffering among the group members and enhance their ability for self-reliance in the future (I9, I11). Quinn, likewise, is also a teacher. He brings people together through Buddhism and Tai Chi at his centre. There he helps people overcome what he believes to be the Western cultural traits of low self-esteem, self-hatred and guilt (Q9). Thus, Quinn, despite being semi-retired, makes a significant contribution to broadening networks dedicated to the improvement of human potential.

Mia and Abby are passionate activists. Both have always engaged in activities to protect social justice and the environment. Both care deeply about the world and how destructive human behaviour is causing unsustainability. Buddhism has been instrumental in fostering a kinder form of activism. This has largely been because Buddhism has instilled compassion and empathy (A10, M13). Mia and Abby no longer act out of hatred or egotism. Rather, they understand that people and the world have always been driven by delusions but that they need no longer partake in them. Their activism is now personally sustainable and incorporated within practice - the practice of keeping their mind pure which ironically enhances the effectiveness of their engagement.

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8 The impact of these books is my personal judgement having distributed several copies myself.
4. **Buddhism ignores reciprocity in favour of compassion.**

Buddhism does not deal overtly with reciprocity. Rather, it propounds the notion of compassion and giving based on the belief of karma. Karma is a much more complex idea than reciprocity and has a much longer timescale. At an even deeper level, compassion is based on the foundation of interconnectedness – the idea that each one of us is inextricably part of the world and hence is the world. Action aimed at others is, thus, action on ourselves. Karma and interconnectedness therefore render reciprocity, where giving occurs in expectation of return, irrelevant. Nevertheless, the kindness, empathy and giving that Buddhism encourages have similar effects to reciprocity. However, these qualities are deeper, have a greater resemblance to altruism and, if they can be harnessed, will have a greater impact on social capital than reciprocity.

**8.3.4 Well-being (Ultimate Ends)**

Well-being corresponds to human fulfillment, the ultimate ends. Well-being is at the top of the Daly pyramid. It includes notions such as happiness, harmony, self-realisation, community, transcendence and enlightenment. The clear articulation of well-being is critical to sustainability because:

1. It provides the direction to be taken.
2. It allows assessment of whether well-being is being achieved or not and with what efficiency (through the use of appropriate indicators).
3. It directly confronts the present development paradigm which is “mobilizing enormous flows of resources, spewing out unsupportable quantities of waste, building huge capital structures, and clearly not achieving happiness” (Meadows 1999:68 – stress in original).
4. It provides “convincing grounds on which humankind can justify the project of sustainability” to understand that we might be something more than “a planetary plague” (Orr 2002:1459) – the impetus of humanity to move forward together.

Defining well-being for sustainability is like giving a ship the correct coordinates for its destination. When a ship is given inaccurate coordinates it inevitably sails towards the wrong place. If those coordinates also happen to require a perilous path through icebergs then the ship is in danger. If the ship’s system reinforces the need for speedy progress despite warnings then that ship is in severe danger. This is the present situation of humanity on earth: the coordinates are wayward, the path is frighteningly hazardous and the indicators erroneously self-reinforcing. The imperative of sustainability is to find the right coordinates and a path to get there. Along the way we must also re-examine what the true destination we really want is. This requires questioning the basic assumptions on what constitutes
well-being: what is happiness, what is harmony, what is community and what is purpose? Fortunately, these questions have been debated for millennia and have produced many credible, and often similar, answers. Thus, Meadows (1999:68) believes that expressing what constitutes well-being, the ultimate ends of sustainability, although challenging, is possible:

If we search sincerely and if we are open to answers that may not look like scientific formulae, I believe that ultimate ends can be defined, at least qualitatively, and that the definitions are not so different from one human soul to another. (stress in original)

This is because, despite superficial differences, “when it comes to the [ultimate] ends themselves, the essential human values, we are, quite simply, all human” (Meadows 1999:68). Our common humanity runs too deep. When it comes to the common denominators of what humans live for, these can be found. This study provides evidence that Buddhism is a spiritual tradition that enables humanity to find compelling definitions of well-being and a justification to undertake the project of sustainability. All the participants demonstrate the ability to engage thoughtfully and deeply on the subject. The three areas of well-being that emerged in this study are: personal sustainability, happiness and purpose in life.

1. Personal sustainability is a key issue in Buddhism and sustainability.

The notion of personal sustainability is a different perspective that also articulates the meaning of well-being in parallel to Meadows’ interpretation. In particular, personal sustainability pays attention to factors that render the lives of people unsustainable mentally and physically. Mental unsustainability is to live a life miserably or without fulfillment. Physical unsustainability is to self-destruct, die or be very ill. The factors that cause mental and physical unsustainability are negative conditionings, traumas, suffering, ill health and a meaningless life. These factors must be overcome first before people can experience higher states of well-being such as happiness and harmony. The participants in this study demonstrate that Buddhist practice can help overcome these factors over time and, thus, build a stronger foundation for well-being.

The notion of personal sustainability is important because, it is argued here, negative factors preventing the attainment of well-being are prevalent in our present cultures. These cultures include not only Western Christian or materialist cultures but also many others including so-called Buddhist ones. Negative factors have always been around as long as people and societies have existed because the human desire to dominate one another is too instinctual. Thus, social structures throughout the ages have enforced one form of oppression or another and have contributed to psychological, sometimes pathological, conditionings. Often, these conditionings are passed from generation to generation. Even without these conditionings, Buddhism contends that, at the deepest level, people are born with insecurities and fear - the inescapable truth of human nature. However, Buddhism also asserts that it is

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not their existence that is important but how one deals with them. Buddhism advocates the solution known as ‘practice’. The findings of this study indicate that practice can succeed given the right training and effort. The findings suggest that even a mind that is ingrained with destructive self-perpetuating habits can be developed and retrained. This is because practice is a contemplative approach that explores through observation the subtleties of the mind. When the true nature of the mind is revealed, the negative tendencies and habits, along with the desire to cling to them, can be discarded. The participants in this study are living examples that transformation towards well-being is an attainable goal.

2. Happiness in Buddhism is refined and beyond the ordinary.
Buddhism has always proposed a notion of happiness that is unique. For Buddhism, happiness is about liberation, enlightenment, interconnectedness and wholeness. These are difficult conceptions that require years of experience and exploration. This study is part of the debate on what happiness can mean within the context of global sustainability. The answers of the participants (Chapter 7) demonstrate both the sophistication of thought process and the willingness to learn and move beyond the conventional. These answers renew hope that human beings can grow beyond materialistic tendencies that is the heart of unsustainability, and achieve something greater, in harmony with each other and nature.

3. Purpose in Buddhism calls for humanity to fulfill its potentials.
Purpose in Buddhism is concerned with realising the Buddhist notion of happiness. That purpose is, of course, beyond the mundane; at the ultimate level, it is otherworldly. Nevertheless, achieving that purpose is unavoidably a process of engagement with others and the world. Thus, compassion, kindness and integrity are essential virtues because they arise out of the logic that accounts for the well-being of oneself, the well-being of others and their intimate interconnection. The participants in this study have strived for these virtues in an attempt to realise Buddhist purpose. Their lives set precedents for the project of sustainability because they are based on a long-term vision of human potential which is actualised in the moment to moment of everyday life. Their lives epitomise what Orr (2002:1457) calls “a deeper process akin to humankind growing to a fuller stature”, a prerequisite for sustainability. Buddhist purpose can be regarded as an example of a guiding light.
8.3 Transformation towards Sustainability: Leverage Points and Buddhism

Thus far, the findings of the study have been interpreted within Meadows’ sustainability framework. In this section, the final synthesis takes place as the Buddhist contribution to systemic sustainability is placed within the scheme of leverage points to suggest a transformative pathway to sustainability.

In her systemic view, Meadows asserts that the best way to achieve sustainability is to intervene at the places with the most impact or, as she states, “where a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything” (Meadows 1999b:1). In *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System* (Meadows 1999b) she provides a hierarchal scheme of places, ranging from the least effective to the most powerful, where change can be induced (Figure 2.6). This scheme has already been described in Section 2.5.2. Compared with the sustainability framework, the scheme is about how to engender dramatic change or, in other words, how to bring about enormous efficiency, sufficiency and environmental sustainability with the least effort. This question is addressed at a theoretical supra-level that both classifies practical solutions and determines their efficacy.

In the drive towards sustainability where time is limited (for example, time until climate change creates an irreversible collapse in global systems) and filled with uncertainties, understanding which initiatives are most appropriate and which are slow or ineffectual is important. However, this is a complex task which few have sought to tackle and Meadow’s scheme remains the only one of its kind. Unfortunately, the scheme is still nascent following her death in 2001, but this does not diminish its importance. On the contrary, its existence suggests that it is possible – though not easy - to find ways of achieving sustainability that are fundamentally transformative and that can produce the desired result quickly.

This study has focused on the most powerful leverage points in Meadows’ scheme, namely, goals of the system, shifting paradigm and transcending paradigm. These are discussed below together with the impact of Buddhism according to the findings of this study.

1. The goals of a society dictate its level of sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability.

The goals of a system ensure that everything in the system is oriented towards them. In a society, the goals determine the organisation, production and distribution of capital flows. Thus, the goals directly determine the level of sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability of that particular society. For example, if the primary goal is to produce as much material output as possible then as much natural capital as necessary will be used to produce the greatest amount of economic goods, services and infrastructure without taking into account the health of nature or whether well-being is being satisfied.
In short, this kind of society is very inefficient, inequitable and destructive of nature. However, if the primary goal is justice underpinned by a culture of frugality, then that society would concentrate on the equality of distribution of goods and the way these goods are produced. In other words, such a society would pay significant attention to sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability.\footnote{This can be seen when one contrasts Scandinavian socialism with laissez-faire US capitalism, both democratic but one very different from the other.}

The implication of goals in society on sustainability is thus obvious. What is less obvious is how these goals arise in the first place. It is argued here that goals are formed firstly at the individual level and then institutionalised or subsumed within the group collectivity through various formal and informal processes. However, because of limited scope, this study only focuses on individual goals, and how Buddhism shapes them and their impact on the larger society.

2. **Buddhism can change purpose in life and collectively can alter society’s goals towards sustainability.**

Based on the findings of this study, Buddhism has the ability to dramatically change the purpose in life of individuals. This is documented in Chapter 7 and the findings summarised in Table 7.2. The new purpose in life is often radically different from conventional ways of thinking because it focuses entirely on non-material satisfaction of well-being. Well-being can be construed as personal well-being (as demonstrated by Theravada Buddhists) or well-being of all sentient beings (as demonstrated by Mahayana and Mahayana-inspired Buddhists). The first group is represented by Zara, Uthai and Rae (Group 1). Frank, a Zen Buddhist, is added to this group because he displays similar individualistic pursuit of practice although the cosmology of Zen is one of absolute interdependence. The second group is represented by Abby, Isaac, Kacy, Quinn and Mia (Group 2).

This section seeks to assess the contribution of the participants’ purpose in life to the core properties of sustainability. The contribution of both groups, Group 1 and 2, is summarised in Table 8.1.

The contribution of Group 1 is mainly through efficiency gain. This efficiency gain is potentially enormous because these participants require little or no material objects beyond basic necessities to satisfy well-being. Should their life’s purpose be adopted as societal goals, the effect would be one of streamlining the supply and production chain to a bare minimum. This is equivalent to saying that very little natural capital would be required to produce a lot of happiness. However, individuals in this group attain well-being through a personal, spiritual journey and are not necessarily interested in the well-being of others beyond their circle of family, friends and associates. Thus, their impact on sufficiency and environmental sustainability is uncertain and depends entirely on individual characteristics. At
most, individuals in this group contribute to sufficiency indirectly through their work to assist other people to enter the spiritual life: they amplify efficiency gain through knowledge distribution. While the impact of this work should not be underestimated, their contribution to sufficiency is very specific in nature and generally does not enter structural domains. In real life, the change of purpose driven by Buddhism may not necessarily produce any personal efficiency gain, that is, their ecological footprint may remain the same. However, it halts any excessive material accumulation and associated competitiveness that are the hallmarks of consumerism and economic materialism. The findings in this study suggest that this is the case because the four participants in this group generally lead the same life as before the adoption of Buddhism (although it is hard to be certain given the large time span) and their contributions to justice and the environment are probably relatively divorced from Buddhism.

Table 8.1: Impact of life’s purpose on sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Contribution to Sustainability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Group 1: Pure Theravada** | • Efficiency: high  
• Sufficiency: variable  
• Environmental sustainability: uncertain |
| • Zara  
• Uthai  
• Rae  
• Frank (Zen) |
| **Group 2: Mahayana or influenced** | • Efficiency: high  
• Sufficiency: high  
• Environmental sustainability: high |
| • Abby  
• Isaac  
• Kacy  
• Quinn  
• Mia |

The potential contribution to sustainability of Group 2 is much wider in scope. If Group 1’s contribution can be rated as significant then Group 2’s could be considered a quantum leap for sustainability. This is because individuals in Group 2 contribute highly to sufficiency and environmental sustainability as well as efficiency. The contribution to efficiency is similar to that of individuals in Group 1 because personal spiritual development is the essential foundation of all forms of Buddhism. Yet Group 2 also generates large gains in sufficiency because group individuals propound that the purpose in life is not merely individual salvation, but the salvation of all sentient beings. To save all sentient beings, notions of justice and equity are a given. In fact, notions of justice and equity
become limited because saving others entails perhaps more noble characteristics such as sacrifice, altruism and compassion, something that justice and equity lack. Thus, Group 2 espouses characteristics beyond mere structural notions of justice and equity in favour of combining them with inner virtues that transcend structural injustice and inequity. With regards to environmental sustainability, Group 2 logically perseveres to preserve the integrity of nature through whatever means possible. This is because sentient beings, which include humans and animals, are part of nature and saving them requires saving nature. The findings in this study suggest that the high potential of Group 2 to contribute to sustainability is indeed being realised. This is demonstrated through efforts in environmental conservation, community building and awareness raising as well as personal spiritual development. The findings of this study point to individuals in this group as powerful change agents for sustainability through their contribution to the combination of efficiency, sufficiency and environmental sustainability. If these individuals succeed in changing societal goals to those of their Buddhism, one could speculate what the system properties of society would include:

1. Efficiency
   • Extremely high efficiency since there is no focus on material production for its own sake but only that which sustains human beings and the cultures which are conducive to true well-being.
   • Spiritual development would be the norm of society.

2. Sufficiency
   • All people would be ensured basic necessities for health and survival.
   • All people would be required to treat each other on the basis of ethics.
   • Development of virtues such as compassion and empathy would take precedence as means of achieving equity and justice.
   • Sufficiency would be expanded to include animals, at least in wild nature but possibly to all animals.

3. Environmental sustainability
   • The health of nature and the health of living beings in nature would be guaranteed.
   • Guaranteeing environmental health necessitates benign technologies and a precautionary approach to science.

Any gain in one area could amplify gain in other areas. Such a society would rapidly strengthen its core attributes and move at an accelerating rate towards sustainability. From this scenario, it can be seen that purpose in life and their translation into goals of society could be powerful leverage points for change towards sustainability. However, a major problem remains how these goals can be brought about at an
Situating the Findings within Meadows’ Systemic Pathway to Sustainability

individual level and at a societal level both of which entail a radical transformation of worldviews. The answer lies at the paradigm level.

3. Change in purpose and goals are dependent on paradigm shifts. Buddhism provides a way.
People do not wake one day and say, “I want to change my life’s purpose.” This only happens when basic assumptions about themselves and how the world works are challenged; that is to say, purpose is dependent on the paradigm each individual holds. Similarly, the goals of a society arise out of its paradigm, which in turn are merely negotiated consensus of individual beliefs and assumptions. In fact, not only the goals of society but also everything in it including all physical structures emerges from paradigms. As Meadows (1999b:18) states, “Paradigms are the sources of systems. From them, from social agreements about the nature of reality, come system goals and information flows, feedbacks, stocks, flows and everything else about systems.” Quite simply, paradigms dictate what a society looks like. Changing paradigms is therefore an even more fundamental place to intervene, a more powerful leverage point, than changing goals. Changing paradigms does not merely change the goals; it changes the whole basis on which a society is built.

The cause of unsustainability is erroneous human paradigms. Our present model of how the world works, how we relate to nature and how we satisfy well-being is extremely flawed resulting in inefficiency, injustice and unsustainable destruction of nature. Simply put, our paradigms, beliefs and assumptions are out of tune with reality. Therefore, the solution to unsustainability is to replace these with something close to truth or, at least, less distorted. The findings in this study suggest some beliefs and assumptions that are more reality-true and more conducive to sustainable behaviour. Some examples of the dominant beliefs, their social consequences and Buddhist postulates for replacement are provided below. The Buddhist postulates are based on the paradigmatic beliefs of the participants in this study. The brief conclusion for each example aims to stimulate debate and can only be validated when the Buddhist postulate is adopted - an unlikely scenario for the time being.

a. Utility

- Individual level: Happiness results from consumption
- Society level: Progress equals material and consumption growth
- Buddhist postulate: Happiness has nothing to do with material accumulation or consumption but is dependent on the quality of the mind

Utility is a fundamental assumption behind conventional economics. In a single stroke, it defines what well-being is. It has led to the creation of production systems that serve growthmania at the expense of everything else. It is one of the most damaging assumptions of an unsustainable society and a great
hindrance to sustainability. The Buddhist postulate is that happiness has virtually nothing to do with consumption beyond satisfying basic needs. It has been demonstrated to be more reality-true by the participants in this study and by countless philosophers and sages down the ages, Buddhist and otherwise. Yet the dominant mode of thinking prevails. The adoption of this Buddhist postulate, or any other refined models of happiness, would be a monumental and necessary shift towards sustainability.

b. Darwinism

• Individual level: Humans are like animals only more evolved
• Society level: Survival of the fittest
• Buddhist postulate: Humans have the capacity to work compassionately together to help each other and all living things transcend mundane existence

Darwinism is the underlying assumption behind economic productivity: competition leads to market efficiency and consumption growth. Unfortunately, it also limits the possibilities of human civilisations. The Buddhist postulate destroys this narrow definition of what a society can be and sets a path of cooperation that focuses on human potentials.

c. Theistic Dictatorship

• Individual level: Humans are limited, bounded by sin, and subservient to a deity’s will
• Society level: Conformance to a deity’s will as a sign of faith and submission
• Buddhist postulate: Humans control their own destiny through actions and thoughts

Theistic dictatorship, a hallmark of religious fundamentalism, remains strong despite being undermined by the Enlightenment and modernity. It is a negative view of the human race that circumscribes human action through guilt and subordination (as displayed by some of the participants). The Buddhist postulate removes these shackles to allow freedom. It is the contention of this study that a paradigm shift towards sustainability must necessarily entail releasing human beings from guilt, fear and mental slavery that are destructive of personal well-being and the well-being of society.

d. Materialism

• Individual level: Actions have limited or no consequences
• Society level: We can do anything we like to other people and nature
• Buddhist postulate: All actions even at the level of thoughts have unavoidable, long-term consequences (karma)

The materialist position has been a basic assumption permitting atrocities of human beings to one another, to animals and to nature for much of history. When actions have no consequences beyond the
immediate physical reaction then any action is sanctioned. At a society level, it creates a delusion of undiluted power and an arrogance to do whatever that society wishes. The boundaries of ethics disappear. The materialist position is the height of folly if the participants’ views are to be believed. The Buddhist postulate is karma, an idea which affirms that every action, even the movement of the mind, has a consequence, and is regarded as a universal law in the same way that Newton’s third law states that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Thus, karma frames volition and action within the context of personal responsibility: you reap what you sow, right down to your thoughts. Karma also provides a long timescale in which consequence can play out; it teaches care and thoughtfulness. The adoption of karma as a paradigmatic belief would help transform a society’s behaviour to something more conducive to sustainability.

e. Cartesian Dualist Legacy

- Individual level: I exist as independent, separate entities
- Society level: We are independent, separate, entities and our society is separate from others and nature
- Buddhist postulate: Everything is interdependent and in flux

The idea of separation as the foundation of scientific knowledge has plagued Western societies for centuries but the present plight of unsustainability to befall the whole earth may finally reflect its illogic. To surmount this crisis, a paradigm shift – from separateness to the Buddhist postulate of interdependence – is critical. Modern science is gradually overcoming this deep-seated belief but it is so entrenched in human consciousness and so institutionalised in modern society that radical means will be required to change the mindset.

f. Exuberance of Mind and Logic

- Individual level: Thoughts equal reality
- Society level: What we believe is true; therefore other cultures are wrong or evil
- Buddhist postulate: Thoughts and reality are two different things. Thoughts are, at best, filtered versions of reality

A line from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* reads: “There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Shakespeare 1992:40, Act 2, Scene 2). The bard’s perceptiveness on the human tendency to colour events with thoughts is quite remarkable and consistent with Buddhist theory. When human beings believe that their thoughts equal reality, the result is disastrous: it justifies prejudice and fear that lead to tyranny. When our thoughts are the only ones that are ‘right’, then others, by default, are ‘wrong’. In other words, conflict always starts in the mind, the mind that is attached to its own creation.
Buddhist postulate emphasises that thoughts must be grounded in reality before action can be derived from them. It proposes constant examination of thoughts, action and action’s consequence, to build a better model of what constitutes reality. A paradigm shift such as this one would facilitate the adoption of new strategies to increase sufficiency, efficiency and environmental sustainability. It would question human assumptions at the root of unsustainability and dispel the legitimacy of many.

This study has shown that paradigm shifts can occur among ordinary individuals when they engage in the Buddhist practice. Buddhist practice allows individuals to examine their fundamental beliefs and assumptions that have been assimilated in the process of life. The experiential evidence garnered through practice then enables individuals to change their understanding of the world. In the same way, paradigm shifts in society can only occur as a result of critical examination of society’s most basic beliefs and assumptions. This critical examination must be performed collectively and the process institutionalised to ensure momentum towards sustainability. However, the collective process, while social in nature, must in the end always remain personal. It is the contention of this study that when it comes to the most paradigmatic assumptions of our lives we must always look inside to seek answers of what really constitutes happiness, what really constitutes our relationship with others and what really constitutes the ultimate purpose. For the answers always lie in the minds, the minds of individuals whose true understanding can change the world.

4. Buddhism and transcendence: the potential to unleash change.

The power to transcend paradigm is the highest leverage point in Meadows scheme. It is about removing ourselves from any notion that we can conceptualise and hold *truth* in our mind and to remind ourselves religiously of this limitation. Using Meadows’ own words, transcending paradigms means:

[T]o keep oneself unattached in the arena of paradigms, to stay flexible, to realize that *no* paradigm is “true,” that every one, including the one that sweetly shapes your own worldview, is a tremendously limited understanding of an immense and amazing universe that is far beyond human comprehension (Meadows 1999b:19 – stress in original).

As she continues, the sense of humility required is evident:

It is to “get” at a gut level the paradigm that there are paradigms, and to see that that itself is a paradigm, and to regard the whole realization as devastatingly funny. It is to let go into Not Knowing … (Meadows 1999b:19).

Transcending paradigm is not something intuitive or easy to grasp much less actualise. We human beings tend to cling on steadfastly to what we believe to be true, to what we think the world looks like. However, within that lies the solution to unsustainability. Were we to let go of these paradigms, allow ourselves to fall into “Not Knowing”, the power to transform everything would be immediately
available. If nothing is worth holding on to, then anything is possible. The link with Buddhism is simply that Buddhist practice is about letting go of all mental objects, from the coarsest to the subtlest. Buddhist practice specifically targets these mental objects - the basic constituents of paradigms - that keep our image of self alive and that keep us behaving often in the most inappropriate way as individuals and as a society. Alan AtKisson, a friend of Meadows, believes that meditation is the kind of practice that Meadows had in mind when she talked about letting go:

I remember the moment that I first “got” the idea of transcending paradigms. Malaysia, 1982. Lots of solitude and meditation and reading. Suddenly it “hits” me, and I write line after line in my journal, about the distinction between thought itself and the objects of thought, especially complex systems of belief – i.e. paradigms. No big deal from a Buddhist perspective, a sort of routine insight really. But this, I think, was what Dana [Meadows] was referring to. Routine for a meditator, not routine for the world, to understand that what we believe to be true is not the same as truth, or about thinking about truth, nor the same as thinking about thinking, nor the observation of thought, or ... etc. etc. (AtKisson, pers. com., 9th June 2005).

The power of Buddhism is exactly that: at the ultimate level, it does not believe in anything. Hence, it allows the spacious possibility for anything to happen at the conventional level – the level on which human society operates - that restores harmony, serenity and sustainability. As Alan AtKisson concludes, transcendence removes the clamp that weds humanity to its collective, often illusionary, visions of reality and allows us to move forward:

If one can transcend paradigms, then one can release them. And choose them.

We understand that paradigms themselves are choices, constructed, relative and conditional, and can choose to suspend them for purposes of observation and reflection…. This is actually critical not just for consciousness, but for any breakthrough in science or knowledge development. (pers. com., 9th June 2005)

Transcending paradigms is the most powerful means of solving the sustainability challenge, or indeed any challenge humanity faces. Two ideas from this study illustrate the meaning of transcendence: compassion and enlightenment.

**Compassion**

Compassion is something of prime importance in Buddhism and at the core of practice for several participants. The most well-known exponent of compassion is the Dalai Lama who has inspired not only Tibetan Buddhists but Buddhists of every tradition around the world. Compassion can help transcend personal and acculturated anger, hatred and fear that erode inner peace and peace among nations, the foundations of sustainability. Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn wrote a poem during the height of the Cold War (Box 8.1). It demonstrates the power of compassion to overcome a narrow sense of self.
Box 8.1: Please Call Me By My True Names

I have a poem for you. This poem is about three of us. The first is a twelve-year-old girl, one of the boat people crossing the Gulf of Siam. She was raped by a sea pirate, and after that she threw herself into the sea. The second person is the sea pirate, who was born in a remote village in Thailand. And the third person is me. I was very angry, of course. But I could not take sides against the sea pirate. If I could have, it would have been easier, but I couldn't. I realized that if I had been born in his village and had lived a similar life - economic, educational, and so on - it is likely that I would now be that sea pirate. So it is not easy to take sides. Out of suffering, I wrote this poem. It is called "Please Call Me by My True Names," because I have many names, and when you call me by any of them, I have to say, "Yes." (Thich Nhat Hanh n.d.:n.p.)

Don't say that I will depart tomorrow --
even today I am still arriving.

Look deeply: every second I am arriving
to be a bud on a Spring branch,
to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings,

learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.

I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
to fear and to hope.

I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.
And I am the arms merchant,
selling deadly weapons to Uganda.

The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
of all that is alive.

I am the mayfly metamorphosing
on the surface of the river.
And I am the bird
that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.

I am the frog swimming happily
in the clear water of a pond.
And I am the grass-snake
that silently feeds itself on the frog.

I am the twelve-year-old girl,
refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.
And I am the pirate,
my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.
So many things can be drawn from such a poem. Firstly, it tells us – all of us - to take responsibility for alleviating the suffering of others who share this planet, because we have a hand in creating the conditions that produce their suffering. Secondly, it makes clear that we, in the wrong environment, are just as capable of acts selfishness, even atrocity, because we are no different than those we criticise. It asks us to stop moralising when confronted with violence and injustice, and start healing the wounds beginning with the wounds in our heart. This plea is echoed by the participant Isaac:

What one needs to do is say: “I’m a human being with a mind and a body; I could do any of this.” … You have to face the reality of the human shadow: the potential for destruction or good in us. (I14)

Lastly, Thich Nhat Hahn’s poem tells us that we are a part of every other being on earth. If we truly appreciate this interconnectedness then we will act with compassion to each and everyone we meet. The poem’s emotive glide evokes the deep power in us to rise above the ordinary, to unite and bring about change through compassion. It speaks to the heart from the heart, has no intellectualisation, no arrogance. It is humbleness personified – the call for greater things without fanfare. It is passion without ego. For Thich Nhat Hahn, and many Buddhists, compassion transcends self; it is the dissolution of self to create peace.
Enlightenment

Enlightenment and transcendence are identical in Buddhism; to be enlightened is to transcend self. However, little can be said about enlightenment. It is beyond words. It is not even an idea. It is the zenith of Buddhist aspiration, yet aspiring for it can never be fruitful because enlightenment is about letting go, not aspiring. Enlightenment entails everything and is the true realm of “Not Knowing”. That is why it is so hard to understand, or more precisely, to come to term with. But for the purpose of sustainability, it is not necessary to understand because we know it can be done. This may sound like an overly assertive statement but it is based on the argument that if a human being can let go of one idea, as amply demonstrated by the participants in this study, then it should be possible that all ideas can be let go. It just requires practice, perseverance and a little time. Whatever enlightenment is, or is not, does not matter. Letting go is what matters. Letting go allows us to see our mental constructions and move past all the errors we have made individually, as a society, and as a civilisation. It allows us to begin anew and do whatever we want. It is freedom from the paradigms that have plagued humanity. Letting go shifts the course of history, thought by thought, action by action, moment by moment. That is why the idea of enlightenment is essential to sustainability.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive discussion on the implications of Buddhism for sustainability thinking and practice. Meadows framework for sustainability and her scheme of leverage points have been used to aid analysis.

According to the findings of this study, Buddhism’s contributions to all forms of capital are significant. These contributions affect positively the core properties of sustainability consisting of sufficiency, efficiency and nature’s sustainability. Table 8.2 summarises the findings. Column 1 lists the forms of capital and well-being. Column 2 categorises the contribution of Buddhism to each form of capital and well-being. Column 3 highlights real-life examples of Buddhism’s contributions which are derived from the findings in this study. Column 4 describes the core properties of sustainability affected.

Table 8.2 suggests that Buddhism’s strongest forte is creating efficiency although sufficiency is also a prominent aspect. Efficiency may also be the most powerful way of change because it affects greatly all the other properties. For example, if a system becomes more efficient in translating natural capital into well-being then environmental sustainability is enhanced because there is less pressure on nature and sufficiency is improved because the same amount of resource is available to more people. Improving efficiency is a very effective move towards sustainability.
Table 8.2: Contribution of Buddhism to capitals and impact on sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Capital</th>
<th>Contribution of Buddhism</th>
<th>Application or Interpretation (participant examples)</th>
<th>Sustainability Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natural Capital</strong></td>
<td><strong>Respect for life</strong></td>
<td>• non-killing of life (all forms)</td>
<td>• environmental sustainability (indirect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism encourages respect for life and nature through the first precept</td>
<td>• “doing the least harm” when killing unavoidable (Kacy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Frugality and moderation</strong></td>
<td>• building a monastery (Isaac)</td>
<td>• environmental sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism extols these virtues; reduces consumption</td>
<td>• avoiding consumerism during Christmas (Kacy)</td>
<td>• efficiency (indirect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Forgoing consumption</strong></td>
<td>• learning to live with only basic necessities during retreats (Frank)</td>
<td>• environmental sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism supports this; reduces demand on natural capital</td>
<td>• simplicity despite wealth (Uthai)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Human Capital</strong></td>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td>• sustaining life during youth (Zara)</td>
<td>• efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism helps sustain individual lives</td>
<td>• improving personal sustainability through removal of toxic conditioning or suffering and providing purpose (all)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism emphasises quality through personal sustainability</td>
<td>• coping with menopausal anxieties (Kacy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Health</strong></td>
<td>• dealing with family-related stress (Zara)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism improves health through mental health</td>
<td>• reducing stress in work (Rae, Frank, Uthai)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>• learning to observe of the mind and body (all)</td>
<td>• efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism broadens learning to include inner education</td>
<td>• learning what constitutes true well-being (all)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism helps develop key human qualities</td>
<td>• developing compassion and empathy (Mia, Kacy, Abby, Rae, Frank)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Time: indicator of human capital</strong></td>
<td>• living life at a slower, more contemplative pace (all)</td>
<td>• efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Capital</strong></td>
<td><strong>Trust and Truth</strong></td>
<td>• skilful, useful speech based on motivation for well-being of others (Kacy, Rae)</td>
<td>• efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhism enhances the quality of information available in society</td>
<td>• being conscious of projecting true self-image (Frank, Isaac, Quinn)</td>
<td>• sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Norms</strong></td>
<td>• Speaking the truth about the world and the need for change, but with kindness (Isaac)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Buddhist ethics (<em>sila</em>) as effective norms for well-being of individuals and society</td>
<td>• precepts as guide for behaviour: training principles (all participants)</td>
<td>• sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• broadening interpretation of precepts to include structural (Isaac, Quinn)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Social Capital (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Norms (cont.)</th>
<th>Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- applying precepts at the level of thoughts; practice as the foundation for exploration (Frank)</td>
<td>- enhancing or repairing family relationships (Abby, Isaac, Zara, Mia, Uthai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- promoting harmony and care in workplace (Frank, Rae and Kacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- spreading Buddhist practice and self-reliance in communities (Rae, Isaac, Quinn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- increasing effectiveness of ability to engage (Abby, Mia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- sufficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal sustainability</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Buddhism helps overcome negative conditionings and traumas that prevents well-being</td>
<td>- happiness as lack of suffering (Rae, Quinn)</td>
<td>- saving all sentient beings (Mia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- contentment (Abby, Kacy)</td>
<td>- to be kind (Mia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- seeing dhammachart (Uthai)</td>
<td>- enlightenment (Rae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- to have a harmonious mind every moment (Uthai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- awakening (Abby, Isaac)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- sufficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(those with goals of saving others)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study also finds that Buddhism displays significant potentials for instigating radical human transformation. Buddhism has a great impact on the three most powerful leverage points of purpose in life, shifting paradigm and transcending paradigm. Firstly, Buddhism alters the purpose in life of the participants who abandon conventional purpose in life in favour of spiritual development and helping sentient beings. Such changes provide examples of alternative goals for society that are more conducive to individual, social and ecological well-being. Secondly, Buddhism enables the participants to examine their most basic existential assumptions. This facilitates paradigm shifts. Such shifts are necessary at the social level to abandon prevailing structural paradigms that are at the heart of unsustainability. Thirdly, Buddhism teaches a way to transcend paradigms by removing attachments from any view of self. Transcending paradigms unleashes the infinite potential of all human beings to choose their destiny and the destiny of the world.
CHAPTER 9:
RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the ways in which the beliefs, practices and transformational tools within Buddhism can contribute to living sustainably. This aim arose out of the literature review (Chapter 2). Four research questions were identified to help achieve this aim:

1. How have the beliefs and practices of Buddhism helped people address the problems of personal (un)sustainability in their lives?

2. To what extent, and in what ways, does seeking to live through following Buddhist beliefs and practices lead to a process of paradigmatic transformation in people's lives?

3. To what extent, and in what ways, does the process of transformation contribute to a change in purpose and goals of life and notion of happiness?

4. What are the implications of Buddhism for sustainability thinking and practice?

These questions were explored through in-depth interviews with practicing Buddhists, which were conducted within the spirit of mindful inquiry (Bentz and Shapiro 1998). The answers to these questions were presented and analysed in Chapter 5, 6, 7 and 8.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the major findings of the study according to each of the four research questions. This is done in Section 9.2. Section 9.3 forwards recommendations for personal and social transformation as well as the further research needed in order to clarify a concrete, comprehensive pathway to sustainability suitable for members of both academia and the general public.

9.2 Summary of Findings

This section presents a summary of the findings according to each research question.
9.2.1 Research Question 1

*How have the beliefs and practices of Buddhism helped people address the problems of personal (un)sustainability in their lives?*

The findings of this study suggest that the personal sustainability of all nine participants was enhanced significantly because of the practice of Buddhism. Buddhism was found to provide a new set of beliefs and practices for alleviating or eradicating many barriers that restricted the personal growth of the participants, their sense of self-fulfilment and their quest for happiness. This was achieved through practice techniques that recognised and addressed the causes of the problems. The practice techniques were also accompanied by explanations of how the world works that is different from other religious or materialist traditions. The techniques and explanations reinforced each other and empowered the participants to change their mindset and lifestyle, often radically.

The participants can be divided into two groups according to the most prominent type of issue that was detrimental to their personal sustainability. The two are: (i) life as suffering, and (ii) life as unsatisfactory.

**Group 1: Life as suffering**

The first group is characterised by an experience of suffering. Five participants make up this group: Mia, Quinn, Frank, Kacy and Rae. Although the type and degree of suffering varied from one participant to another, suffering was, without a doubt, something that had to be removed – or at least reduced substantially - to allow the participants in this group to achieve personal sustainability. The participants’ stories are summarised below (their full stories and a comparative analysis were presented in Chapter 5).

Mia suffered terribly as a child and young adult because of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The suffering instilled a smouldering anger in her that threatened to tear her life apart. Tibetan Buddhism provided Mia with an understanding of why things happen and ushered in a new vision of life based on compassion. Simultaneously, Tibetan Buddhism gave her techniques to deal with anger and a cosmology to understand other human beings. As a result, Mia was able to turn her life around through emotional management, and thereby revitalising the relationship with her son, her family and other people.

Quinn experienced religious conditionings during his childhood. These brought about a negative view of self and a feeling of irrational guilt that produced much suffering. Quinn learnt mindfulness through Ch’an Buddhism but found Western Buddhism more suited to his character. Western Buddhism
provided an array of techniques that specifically addressed his conditionings and its non-dogmatic stance and cosmological insights satisfied his intellectual curiosity. Quinn is now “happy, sane, and integrated” as never before in his life.

Frank began to experience existential fear, a form of suffering, during childhood. As a result, one character trait he developed was perfectionism which, unconsciously, he used to assuage this fear. Perfectionism resulted in unnecessary harshness on himself and others. Zen first made him realise that he was perfectionistic and then instilled an ethic of working with it as part of practice. Through many years of vigilance and observation, perfectionism has now ceased to be a problem in his life. On the contrary, Frank is now able to harness its power without being controlled by it, and this has been beneficial for his work as a university lecturer and the teacher of a Zen group.

Kacy experienced two traumatic incidents in her life: sexual assault and menopause. Tibetan Buddhism dealt with the scar and self-pity that sexual assault left behind by giving her a new optimistic worldview based on karma and human potential. Tibetan Buddhism provided the techniques of mindfulness, mantra recitation and Tonglen meditation to help her cope with the ravaging fear and maddening thoughts that accompanied her experience of menopause. The worldview and techniques of Buddhism have not only allowed her to overcome the effects of these traumas but also to address everyday issues of work and family in a purposeful way.

Rae suffered for most of his life. However, this suffering only became clear when he experienced a broken heart, the anxiety of doing business and the stress of university politics. The practice of doo chit within Theravada Buddhism changed that because it changed how his mind worked. Instead of being buffeted by thoughts and emotions, doo chit has allowed him to observe them in a detached manner. As a result, mundane suffering has been eliminated from his family, social and work life. What are left are a deep sense of equanimity and an understanding of reality according to dharma. Buddhism, through the practice of doo chit, has been the bedrock of his personal sustainability.

Group 2: Life as unsatisfactory
The second group consists of four participants who experienced a feeling of life as unsatisfactory. This feeling was the key impediment to personal sustainability and the participants longed for higher forms of purpose and happiness to make their lives worthwhile. This longing drove them to seek alternative spiritual traditions that led to Buddhism. The participants in this group are: Zara, Isaac, Abby and Uthai. Their stories are summarised below.
Zara grew up in a prosperous family and had a happy childhood. However, after much experimentation during her early adult years, she found life to be meaningless and not worth living, the epitome of personal unsustainability. The situation changed remarkably when she began practicing Goenka vipassana: it brought her a level of happiness that she did not think possible. Since then, her life has transformed because Goenka vipassana has allowed her to live joyously even through difficult situations such as her husband’s death and a family crisis. Buddhism, through Goenka vipassana, has allowed Zara to orient her life around spirituality and the task of spreading the dharma in a community of likeminded people.

The idea of ‘community’ is an integral part of Isaac’s sense of self, his sense of personal sustainability. For Isaac, community refers to something greater than usually understood and something an individual cannot exist without: a community provides the fabric for physical, social and spiritual existence. When he moved away from his birthplace, Isaac found that communities were disintegrating in many parts of Australia. Thus, his mission became to resurrect the essence of community in any place he found himself in. Buddhism played a critical role in doing this because it was Thai Theravada Buddhism that gave him the ideals and principles for community-building. Buddhism also gave him tools and techniques for self-development that have, for example, strengthened his confidence, made him kinder on himself and helped him cope with anger. Buddhism has been instrumental to Isaac’s well-being while situating that well-being within the community of friends that now surrounds him.

As a child, Abby had a spontaneous spiritual experience and this created a yearning for higher meanings in life. However, that yearning was not satisfied until she attended a Goenka vipassana retreat in India. Goenka vipassana gave her a sense of happiness, equanimity and belonging that changed the direction of her life. On exploring Buddhism further, she discovered the work of Joanna Macy and was able to integrate her passion for justice with her commitment to practice. These things have resulted in self-fulfillment, inner harmony and an assuredness of the “rightness of things”. She now spends all her time practicing, teaching Buddhism and helping social and environmental causes.

Despite having a privileged background, Uthai felt that his purpose in life was to search for true happiness. However, he could not find any answer in hedonism. Buddhism finally gave Uthai what he was looking for: it gave him an experience of happiness that was far superior than anything he could imagine. Since that moment over thirty years ago, the quest to sustain happiness in every moment has been the most fundamental aspect of Uthai’s life. Mindfulness has been the key practice facilitating this endeavour. Mindfulness has allowed him to see everything the way it really is – to see dhammachart – and therefore maintain an unperturbed mind free from suffering and instability. As a result, Uthai has
Recommendations and Conclusion

led a life of harmony and solidity with very little dependency on externalities for happiness. Buddhism has also given him a social purpose in life. This purpose is to disseminate his understanding of dharma to as many people as possible to make their lives better, and this is what he has been doing for many years.

Summary Conclusion to Research Question 1

This study finds that the personal sustainability of all nine participants has increased greatly with the practice of Buddhism. For five participants (Group 1), the most significant impact of Buddhism was its ability to address suffering. For these participants, Buddhism helped remove key impediments that prevented self-development and the attainment of true happiness. This was achieved through practices such as mindfulness and meditation. Thus, Buddhism became an invaluable vehicle for conducting their lives without which life would be much more difficult and, in several cases, unbearable. Buddhism provided the secure foundation on which these participants could embark on a journey of spiritual growth and self-fulfillment that continues to this day.

For four participants (Group 2), the most significant impact of Buddhism was its ability to address the unsatisfactory nature of their lives. This was achieved because Buddhism provided a new understanding of existence, happiness and human purpose. This understanding gave meaning to the participants’ lives and, over time and through practice, enabled them to completely change their outlook and behaviour. This understanding also supported many social activities that made life fulfilling and created spiritual friendships that were vital for undertaking the spiritual path. Each participant is now totally committed to spiritual development — their own and others — with the aim of achieving and sustaining the ultimate freedom and well-being as described by Buddhism.

9.2.2 Research Question 2

To what extent, and in what ways, does seeking to live through following Buddhist beliefs and practices lead to a process of paradigmatic transformation in people's lives?

The findings in this study demonstrate that Buddhism can have a transformative impact because it can change the basic beliefs within a person’s paradigm. When Buddhist beliefs replace materialist or uncommitted Christian beliefs, the result is often dramatic. However, the kind of change is dependent on the characteristics of the individual, their path to Buddhism and the nature of the Buddhist tradition adopted. Nevertheless, the study found that there were common beliefs that, when accompanied by application in life, induced a shift in paradigm. These beliefs include karma, the three characteristics of existence (impermanence, non-self and suffering), interdependence and emptiness. The study also
found that attitudinal changes were also important. These attitudinal changes include optimism, compassion, empathy and clarity of purpose. The shift in beliefs and attitudes combined to alter the logic, behaviour and purpose in life of all nine participants. Below is a summary of the transformation that took place in each participant.

**Mia**

When Mia converted to Buddhism, she replaced her entire Catholic worldviews with the worldviews of Tibetan Buddhism. All beliefs and assumptions were replaced – a paradigmatic overhaul. Thus, Mia was able to gain a very different understanding of how the human mind and the world work. The ideas of karma and suffering are two important beliefs within this new paradigm. Karma explains the cause and consequence of action and has engendered her with a sense of responsibility for her own well-being. Suffering characterises the human condition but also provides a way out. Karma and suffering are key concepts which, combined with practice techniques, have allowed Mia to distance herself from past conditioning and begin normalising her relationship with others. These changes are the direct result of adopting Tibetan Buddhism as a guide to life.

**Kacy**

Kacy’s paradigm shifted monumentally when she met the Dalai Lama. It was not any particular belief that caused the shift but a realisation of the possibilities of existence. The compassion ideal, something the Dalai Lama embodied and a hallmark of Tibetan Buddhism, dumbfounded her and altered something deep inside. The compassion ideal and other Tibetan Buddhist principles were translated into business practice through the Ten Enlightened Business Principles. These can be regarded as a business paradigm that runs counter to mainstream economic thinking because they espouse serving others and maintaining ethical integrity first and foremost. Though now in semi-retirement, Kacy continues to pursue acts of service and compassion that have been shaped by Tibetan Buddhism.

**Quinn**

The essential Buddhist belief that transformed Quinn’s life and paradigm for living is the idea that the self is fluid, insubstantial and interdependent as oppose to the Western view that the self is fixed, real and separate. This gave Quinn an understanding of why Western people and Western culture are what they are, and an understanding of the root causes of social and environmental problems. With this understanding, Buddhism also provided the impetus for personal change by putting optimism back in Quinn’s life. This is because Buddhism views human beings, despite their flaws, as having unlimited potential to transform themselves and the world into something extraordinary. Quinn’s world – his outlook, attitudes and behaviour - has altered radically since adopting Buddhism some thirty years ago.
Uthai

A monumental paradigm shift occurred when Uthai experienced a form of happiness associated with meditation for the first time. This gave him an understanding of the possibilities of happiness beyond the confines of conventional thinking. A second paradigm shift occurred when Uthai realised that life could be interpreted as dualities: liking something while disliking the opposite caused suffering. This encouraged him to explore fundamental beliefs in Buddhism that eventually led to their adoption as a way of understanding the world. Two beliefs - the nature of existence and karma - became foundational. The nature of existence is the notion that the self is not real, permanent or controllable. When the nature of existence is not understood, naivety and desire to control result. Naivety and desire produce karma and this produces suffering, an indicator of which is mind struggle. Uthai uses mindfulness to break free of this vicious cycle because mindfulness allows him to see the true nature of reality, or dhammachart. Uthai’s Buddhist paradigm has allowed him to live with great equanimity and a minimal amount of suffering because he is less attached to outcomes or states, and hence his mind experiences less perturbation.

Isaac

The Buddhist beliefs central to Isaac’s paradigm are non-self and no control. These beliefs have changed the way Isaac views the world. Non-self espouses the idea that the self is merely a collection of complexes which is given power through identification. No control concerns the idea of letting go of control over the mind and being present with whatever is. Isaac uses these beliefs to achieve personal change by coming to terms with complexes which are destructive to his well-being. Mindfulness is a vital practice that allows this to occur because all changes must start with objective awareness of the present situation. Once the present situation is understood, appropriate action can be taken to establish a new identity. However, the long-term aim in Buddhism is to return to an “unfabricated state of mind” that accompanies enlightenment.

Abby

Abby has assimilated the beliefs and practices of Goenka vipassana deep into her paradigm. The most fundamental belief concerns the idea that every thought, emotion or feeling has a corresponding sensation in the body. The key practice of Goenka vipassana concerns trying to observe this sensation without attachment or judgement. By doing so, equanimity results. Abby has used this practice to alleviate suffering in her life and improve her relationship with other people especially her husband. She has also adopted the interconnected vision of the world according to Joanna Macy as a basis for
activism. The paradigmatic transformation Buddhism has brought has allowed her to focus her energy on helping the world.

**Zara**

Like Abby, Zara’s life revolves around Goenka *vipassana*. This is because Zara experienced a remarkable paradigm shift when she attended her first Goenka retreat in India. That experience changed the health of her physical body but, more importantly, changed her understanding of happiness and existence. As a result, Zara uses the Goenka *vipassana* practice to deal with any situation she encounters in daily life. This means experiences, whether negative or positive, are broken down into sensations. The result is less suffering even in the most difficult circumstances, and an outlook on life that is joyous and light. For Zara, everything that happens is transitive and not worthy of attachment, and the only thing we can do is to take care of others and work towards our own spiritual development.

**Frank**

How Frank operates and how he views the world has changed entirely through years of Zen practice. A key proposition in Zen is that all thoughts and happenings in the mind are inherently without meaning. Thoughts and happenings only have meaning when we act on them. Frank takes this proposition to practice everyday. Practice then is the practice of seeing these thoughts and differentiating what thoughts are grounded in objective reality and what thoughts are not. This enables him to take appropriate action and perform his duties to the best of his abilities. Continual practice both formally and in daily life has allowed a greater appreciation of the connectedness of all things, known as emptiness. Thus, the life of Frank, though outwardly similar to that of an ordinary person, is radically different. It is a life based on his Zen paradigm where every action is more mindful, and the result is a more compassionate world.

**Rae**

When Rae encountered *doo chit* it changed the way he understood practice: practice became about seeing the nature of the mind rather than coercing it into a desired state. This was a paradigm shift of practice and, within a few years, led Rae to what he believes to be the attainment of *sotapanna*, the first stage of enlightenment. The existential paradigm that accompanied *sotapanna* regards the world as empty because all values are human creations. According to this paradigm, the reality of all things consists purely of the three characteristics of existence: impermanence, non-self and suffering. As a result, Rae has abandoned all worldly ambitions in favour of a spiritual quest for happiness that is untainted by human beliefs and defilements.
Summary Conclusion to Research Question 2

Each participant in this study has demonstrated that Buddhist beliefs have changed the way he or she views the world. When combined with practice, Buddhist beliefs have altered the basic paradigm by which each participant operates. This has changed the participants’ directions in life and numerous aspects of their behaviour. The changes are so deep that the terms ‘paradigm shift’ or ‘paradigm transcendence’ are appropriate; that is, Buddhism has engendered the deepest transformation of worldviews and, in some participants, changed the fundamental nature of existence.

9.2.3 Research Question 3

To what extent, and in what ways, does the process of transformation contribute to a change in purpose and goals of life and notion of happiness?

The findings of this study demonstrate that Buddhism can radically alter a person’s purpose and goals in life. This was evident for each of the nine participants. Likewise, Buddhism also made a significant impact on their notions of happiness. Each participant provided a refined, multi-dimensional perspective on what constitutes happiness that is very different from conventional beliefs based on materialism or theistic religions. Below is the summary for each aspect of Research Question 3.

Purpose in Life

The fundamental purpose in life of all nine participants is the spiritual path of Buddhism. That purpose is spiritual growth through practice. The words and ideas that have been used to express this are:

- to attain enlightenment or awakening
- to attain buddhahood
- to end suffering
- to wake up
- to destroy all defilements
- to maintain harmony of the mind
- to be happy with or be kind to oneself

While the words and phrases are different among the participants, they convey similar ideas of profound personal development. These different words are merely derived from different perspectives but all suggest that the nine participants seek transformation at the deepest existential level as their purpose in life. The only significant difference is that some participants regard saving others as an
explicit part of this mission, and something that needs emphasis. Hence, for these participants, words such as ‘service’, ‘compassion’, ‘giving’ and ‘raising consciousness’ are equally important.

Buddhism has been the primary source of purpose and has changed completely the direction in life of all participants.

Happiness

The paradigmatic transformation that accompanied the adoption of Buddhist beliefs and practices has greatly changed the way the nine participants view happiness. All participants have discarded conventional definitions of happiness because they believe them to be too crude for the term. Conventional definitions of happiness are always concerned with achieving a positive feeling derived from an external stimulus, object or event. Some of the examples given by the participants are:

- gaining material objects
- dependence on family and friends for ‘happiness’
- sensual pleasure
- gaining success or reputation
- “Things are going my way”

While these things may be desirable in life, they are conditioned, impermanent and cannot always be relied upon. Hence, the participants suggest alternative ways of understanding happiness that are more refined and self-reliant. Despite their varying Buddhist traditions, the participants’ ideas are very similar. These include the ideas of happiness as a lack of suffering, happiness as inner peace and harmony, happiness as interconnectedness, happiness as contentment and equanimity, and happiness as solidity and confidence. However, these ideas are closely related, one often being dependent on another.

As an example, happiness as a lack of suffering can be interpreted at two levels. On one level, it is the freedom from suffering induced by negative conditioning during childhood or traumatic events. While this is not the ultimate kind of happiness in Buddhism, it is a necessary foundation. Also the boundary begins to fade because all human beings are conditioned and so, when the participants discover how to overcome severe negative conditioning, they also begin to address other aspects of their psyche that remain problematic. At a subtler level, suffering can be regarded as any perturbation of the mind that causes it to lose balance and become out of tune with reality, the natural order of the world. Hence, the lack of suffering always consists of a mind that is totally at ease. This understanding of happiness as lack of suffering is then another expression of happiness as inner peace and harmony. This is because peace means being peaceful within oneself and among others, and harmony also means being
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harmonious within oneself and with others. Peace and harmony mean lack of inner and outer conflict. Peace and harmony also signify a radical receptivity to others; that is to say, peace and harmony are dependent on a deep understanding of and connection with others. This is also the idea of happiness as interconnectedness. When we are fully present and understand the intricacies of our mind, we can forge an empathic bond with others and this in turn enhances our own well-being. When we are truly interconnected, the bond extends to all living and, ultimately, non-living things.

Happiness defined as the first three ideas of a lack of suffering, inner peace and harmony, and interconnectedness also entails a high degree of contentment and equanimity. This is because all these ideas are consistent with a mind that does not struggle to achieve any mental state in particular; there is merely contentment of what is. Therefore contentment means being happy with whatever the situation is even if that situation is not ideal. Equanimity is something that is crucial for contentment because it allows the mind to be stable and less likely rocked by mental forces. This leads to the last idea of happiness as confidence and solidity. This is because experiencing all the other forms of happiness fosters a high degree of confidence in one’s capability. It fosters a sense of solidity because one is not buffeted by life’s happenings. What often emerges is a realisation that the possibilities of something extraordinary, beyond any convention can describe, are within our grasp. Happiness understood as confidence and solidity emerges from continuous practice tested time and time again.

In conclusion, happiness in Buddhism may seem an elusive concept that is hard to define. However, all the participants managed to grasp its essence and were able expressed it in many ways. Ultimately, happiness in Buddhism translates into freedom and liberation from ordinary existence and any suffering endemic to it. Happiness becomes the ‘state’ where the total human potential is unleashed because all barriers have been removed.

9.2.4 Research Question 4

What are the implications of Buddhism for sustainability thinking and practice?

Based on the findings of this study, Buddhism provides many lessons and ideas for sustainability thinking and practice. These lessons and ideas were derived using Donella Meadows’ systemic framework for sustainability (Meadows 1999a) and her scheme of leverage points (Meadows 1999b).

The findings of the study suggest that Buddhism can contribute significantly to many forms of capital and well-being. Concerning natural capital, Buddhism espouses respect for life, frugality and moderation, and the practice of forgoing consumption. These are ways of thinking and living that
reduce the demand on nature, shift the focus to well-being from consumption, and, hence, help protect natural capital. Concerning human capital, Buddhism does not stipulate procreation, improves health especially mental health, and encourages the study of the self that leads to development of positive human qualities. By emphasising the qualitative dimensions of human development, Buddhism promotes the creation of human capital. Concerning social capital, Buddhism encourages the telling of truth that fosters trust, advocates the use of the ethical precepts for living, and strengthens social networks that include family, work and community. In this way, Buddhism supports the flourishing of human relationships based on the ideas of personal integrity and empathy. Concerning well-being, Buddhism emphasises personal sustainability, a refined, experiential understanding of happiness, and the embrace of a spiritual purpose that challenges people to fulfill their human potential. Buddhism asks humanity to re-examine what constitutes well-being, a task vital to sustainability, and provides alternatives that are more refined.

Buddhism’s contributions to capitals and well-being ensure that it has a positive impact on the core properties of sustainability. The impact is greatest for efficiency and sufficiency. How Buddhism is able to generate such impact is explained using Meadows’ scheme of leverage points especially goals of the system, shifting paradigms and transcending paradigms.

Firstly, Buddhism changes the goals in life of people by providing spiritual goals. These goals concern a spiritual journey of mental development that ultimately leads to the cessation of all suffering or enlightenment. This spiritual journey also involves, to a greater or lesser extent, alleviating the suffering of others. The adoption of Buddhist goals in society would have profound implications. It would create new social structures that would facilitate the transition to sustainability. Such social structures would be much more efficient at translating natural capital into well-being and much more sufficient at generating well-being for the greatest number of people.

Secondly, Buddhism provides its own beliefs and assumptions of how the world works. These beliefs and assumptions contrast markedly with their conventional counterparts such as utility, materialism and dualism and are also consistent with the principles of sustainability. Adoption of these would result in paradigmatic shifts that would change the way people and society operate. Thus, Buddhism has the ability to undermine the culture of unsustainability and create transformation in individuals and society leading to a sustainable world.

Thirdly, Buddhism demonstrates the possibility of transcendence. Transcendence frees human beings from all logic and thinking that have chained human civilisations to worldviews. These worldviews have resulted in endless conflicts and wars and, finally, the rapid destruction of planetary life support
systems. When human history is wedded more to hate than love, there is a need to transcend the logic and thinking that gave rise to the situation. Buddhism provides a way to distance ourselves from thoughts and emotions, the root causes of all action. When thoughts are transcended, the true potential of human beings are unleashed. Compassionate action founded on the realisation of intimate interdependence is the result. In such a situation, sustainability becomes de facto.

**9.3 Recommendations for Action and Further Research**

This section forwards recommendations for sustainability action based on the findings of this study and suggests new agendas for scientific research. The section aims to be critical of the status quo but yet be constructive in proposing solutions. It also attempts to provoke discussion and creative energy by addressing difficult and often tabooed issues. These recommendations and suggestions will challenge both ordinary individuals and scientists to re-examine fundamental assumptions and engage in change for a more sustainable world.

This section is divided into five themes. Section 9.3.1 highlights issues in personal sustainability and asks for social recognition of them. Section 9.3.2 focuses on the ability of people and society to change while also forwarding a shift towards personal responsibility instead of rights. Section 9.3.3 explores problematic structural issues preventing sustainability and offers some possible remedies. Section 9.3.4 provides a critique of science together with new directions to ensure that science becomes a constructive force for sustainability. Finally, Section 9.3.5 details how each individual can contribute to sustainability in five arenas of action.

**9.3.1 Personal Sustainability**

Buddhist beliefs posit personal unsustainability as the root cause of global unsustainability. Put another way, Buddhism attributes the cause of conflict, social degradation and environmental destruction to personal unhappiness and lack of fulfillment. Buddhism contends that the condition of the mind is always reflected ‘outwards’. Thus, anger is reflected out; hatred is reflected out; frustration is reflected out. Quite simply, if people are not at peace with themselves, violence of some form, either against nature or other people, will result: Spiritual carnage inside results in physical carnage outside - and personal issues become global issues.

This study has highlighted many causes of personal unsustainability. These include living within a dysfunctional family, under religious domination, with trauma and in spiritual void. This study has also revealed some of the cures that can bring joy back into life and remove negative conditioning. The
assertion here is that all human beings are alike and that, to a greater or lesser extent, each of us has to grapple with the issue of personal sustainability. Unfortunately, our society regards this endeavour as a personal journey and gives it little attention. Simply put, issues in personal sustainability are not recognised in any systematic way in the public domain. This is evidenced by the fact that there is no official ‘catalogue’ of the issues ailing our mind unlike there is for physical illnesses. There are no prescribed remedies to fear, anger, self-hatred unlike there are for cancer, diabetes or heart disease. In fact, these mental afflictions have been downgraded as belonging to the weak and the faint-hearted. Hence our leaders only portray strengths: bravery, intellect, charm and authority. This is an unfortunate state of affairs, the continuation of denial handed down the ages, and directly undermines global sustainability. This study proposes that we stop living in delusion and start addressing the real issues facing each and every human being. It proposes:

1. Human society should recognise the precarious nature of the human mind that is buffeted by forces such as fear, anger, doubt and insecurity, and recognise that these forces are great threats to individual and social well-being.

2. Human society should confront these forces at every level of society and place priority in resolving the inner conflict that accompanies them.

3. Human society should ensure that all people have access to education and support that allow them to deal effectively with issues in personal sustainability.

These propositions seek to undermine the culture of neglect that ignores the inner world while adding insult to injury through mental oppression. They would overthrow the culture that perpetuates violence – inner and outer violence – while propounding violence to be the unavoidable course of human destiny. They would bring to the fore a debate on the true nature of human beings. They would constitute a major step in building a foundation for global sustainability.

**Research agenda**

In order for the importance of personal sustainability to be accepted, scientific research is urgently required. Otherwise, personal sustainability will remain the domain of self-help and relegated to the fringe of society as something of secondary importance to social and economic issues. The research needs are as follows:

- *To describe the major mental afflictions preventing personal sustainability, their causes and their effect on the human mind, body and behaviour.*

Exploration of mental afflictions is something this study has attempted to do. However, given the broad focus on systemic sustainability, a detailed exposition has not been possible. A much more thorough
investigation is required using methods such as phenomenological life history. The major aims of such investigations should be a) to describe the nature of mental afflictions, b) to discover the possible causes of these or the conditions out of which they arise, and c) to gauge the effect on behaviour. The research should attempt to uncover the complex links between the past and the present that reflect changes in the state of mind. The idea is to generate theories on how the mind develops with emphasis on how destructive emotions become lodged in the psyche. New research techniques that include meditation, cognitive psychology and psychotherapy may be useful. A multidisciplinary approach will be needed.

**b. To describe the pattern of personal sustainability problems in today’s society.**

Personal sustainability problems spare very few people and affect all races, creeds and denominations. What are not known are the extent, pattern and variation across society. Much work needs to be done in this area. Research of this kind could target specific groups in a population. For example, this study included two Catholic participants and their experience has demonstrated the potential for abuse in Catholicism. However, this does not mean that all Catholics experience these problems or that all Catholic cultures are abusive. New research could focus on personal sustainability problems of Catholics. New research could also involve many types of cross-cultural comparisons, for example, between white Caucasians and minorities or indigenous groups. These would broaden the scope and understanding of personal sustainability and shed light on different ways to address problems within it.

**c. To describe the impact of mental afflictions and the paradigms they affect on social behaviour.**

This is perhaps the most difficult topic. We know little about the relationship between paradigms and social behaviour much less about how mental afflictions within paradigms shape society. While we can speculate, the empirical evidence is not available.\(^1\) Hence there is a need for innovations in ways of exploring this topic and Buddhist perspectives may prove useful. Because of the huge breadth and scope, research would likely involve individual projects in multiple disciplines such as sociology, social psychology, anthropology and religion. Understanding the topic would require gradual synthesis of many different kinds of knowledge, both new and pre-existing. Cooperation with thinkers, researchers and practitioners in virtually all fields of social and psychological science (and beyond) would be essential.

### 9.3.2 Human Transformation

The capacity for change should be understood as something that all human beings possess. This is very important for sustainability because sustainability is no longer about environmental preservation or

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\(^1\) For example, see Gladwin et al. (1997) as described briefly in Chapter 1.
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technological innovation; it is about the radical transformation of human consciousness. This study has demonstrated that people can change and, thus, it forwards two propositions for social adoption:

1. The innate ability of human beings to change should be recognised.
This proposes an explicit recognition that behaviour, habits, attitudes and even the fundamental paradigm of all people – the young, the old, the educated, the uneducated, religious adherents of all traditions, people of all nationalities and races – can change. It states that nothing is immutable, nothing cannot be touched. It regards all expressions of the human mind as the constructions of that mind, and therefore subjected to flux and movement. Given the right approach, anything can be changed.

This proposition has at its core the concept of absolute freedom of human beings given the right training. It does not accept positions of power and dominance. It advocates freedom from slavery, especially from structural slavery of invisible masters which are almost always men of power hiding behind ‘righteous’ institutions. It also decries any view of human beings as fixed entities held down by supernatural forces or subservient to the will of deities. Deities may exist but the freedom, the power and perhaps the equality of human capacity must be established if a genuine effort towards sustainability is to be galvanised. Human beings cannot be enshrouded by fear if sustainability is to be achieved because courage will be of utmost importance.

Research agenda
This study has helped substantiate what history has already told us all along: people can change; they can learn to think positively, they can develop self-esteem, they can cultivate kindness and empathy, and they have the ability to become exemplars of humanity despite humble origins. However, to discover what constitutes human transformation is a challenging pursuit. This study has only begun the process of investigation and only specifically through the lens of Buddhism. It leaves more questions than answers. Addressing the topic of how a human being changes could be done in at least three ways:

a. Cognitive science
Psychology and psychotherapy combined to form a vast field investigating the human mind. It is not within the scope of this study to review issues in this field suffice to say that the understanding it has generated is still limited as Mahoney (1995:277) states:

The debate about cognitive processes and their potential role in a scientific understanding of human experience has now gone on for the better part of a century. It has generated more heat than light, in my opinion.
The study of the human mind and processes associated with change requires greater impetus and recognition in human society. Cognitive science most likely will require methodological innovations if it is to go beyond providing inadequate theories that contradict one another.

b. Buddhism
The scientific interest in Buddhism is a recent trend as Buddhism has become more widely accepted in the West. Buddhism is billed as the ‘science of the mind’. Some cognitive research has focused on meditation and mindfulness in an attempt to understand the mental change process (Germer, Siegel & Fulton 2005; Kristeller & Johnson 2003). In Buddhism, meditation is regarded sometimes as a method for purifying the mind and sometimes as the observation of the mind. However, these are just two different ways of looking at the same thing: observation leads to purity and purifying necessitates observation to understand the nature of the mind. The effect of meditation has been studied in various fields (see for example, Kristeller 2003; Pongpieng 1999) and further studies may reveal deeper insight into the transformation process. However, there seems little evidence that meditation has been used as a tool for research. This might be an interesting approach because certain forms of meditation aim to remove all personal constructions and biases from the mind (though this is rarely possible and is only associated with an enlightened human being). A skilled meditator can experience a state of being far different from the cognitive scientist. Thus, the ability of a skilled meditator to explore the mind (his or her own, or others’) may be much greater than that of the scientist or the ordinary research participant. New research may involve chronicling changes through self-diary combined with regular interviewing over years or decades. The aim would be to identify the causes of behaviour and triggers of change. Again, methodological innovation would be required to move Buddhism from the realm of religious belief systems to the realm of science.

c. Physiology and Neuroscience
The study of the workings of the body especially the brain may yield useful information on how the human mind changes. If we understand the physiological basis of change – what happens at the molecular and cellular level in the brain – it may help substantiate practices such as meditation and stimulate exploration into methods or processes facilitating change. So far there is evidence to suggest that meditation may be associated with structural changes of the brain (Lazar, Kerr, Wasserman, Gray, Greve et al. 2005) and that meditation changes the activity of certain parts of the brain (Brefczynski-Lewis, Lutz, Schaefer, Levinson & Davidson 2007). Unfortunately, brain science is very young and even the link between the anatomy of the brain and the ability of the mind is tentative (Witelson, Kigar

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This phrase was used by Apichai Puntasen, a leading Buddhist economist, at a conference entitled ‘Sufficiency Economy’ held in Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, in 2007.
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& Harvey 1999). Brain science also may not resolve the long-standing philosophical debate on the nature of the relationship between the mind and the body.

2. The responsibility of human beings to change should be given precedence over rights.

The rights of people to such things as freedom of speech, freedom of action and freedom of choice have become something of a given in many societies around the world. The notion of rights is associated with the Western quest for freedom that began in Ancient Greece (Loy 2002). Perhaps the most famous right is the First Amendment of the United States Constitution which prevents the state from limiting free speech. While rights have liberated citizens from much tyranny, they, combined with economic liberalism, have also fostered an individualistic culture of irresponsibility. Thus, the right to free speech is also the right to lie, to slander, to agitate, to humiliate, to spread malicious rumours, to mislead and to tell half-truths. In fact, many societies have normalised these negative practices of free speech as seen in election campaigning, political lobbying, product marketing and television. To find truth in the copious amount of speech put out is often very difficult. It is argued here that rights are two-pronged instruments. On the one hand, they can be essential in mitigating blatant oppression. On the other hand, they are open to abuse leading to negative social repercussions that have the potential to tear society apart. The effect of the latter is particular pertinent today as the move towards sustainability has been maligned, discredited and thwarted by powerful interest groups using free, but untruthful, speech (see for example, Welford 1997).

The proposition of this study is simple: rights should be of secondary importance to responsibility and where rights exist they should always be accompanied by responsibility. This is because rights are entitlements to individualistic pursuit that do not take into consideration the impact on others or society. Unless the exercise of rights specifically impinges on the rights of others (for example, murder), then actions taken within those rights are construed as being harmless. In fact, this is far from the case, for example:

- lies create mistrust in society and erode social capital;
- advertising can create a pseudo-need that accelerates environmental degradation;
- indiscriminate use of protests can generate disruption, hatred and violence;
- voting without careful consideration elects unsuitable leaders.

Even at the level of being, the impact of an individual can be felt all around. For example, if an individual is miserable, misery is spread to friends and family alike, and can fan like wildfire. The idea

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3 The proposition is line with the spirit of the Earth Charter but here the idea of responsibility is taken even further. I do not necessarily like the word ‘responsibility’ as it conjures up the idea of ‘duty’ of hard-edged Protestantism. Rather, I use it to mean action based on wise reflection of true well-being of oneself, others and the whole world. This is ‘responsible action’.
is simply this: miserable people create a miserable society for all. However, being miserable is a choice not a fait accompli. In a society underpinned by responsibility, *an individual does not even have the right to remain miserable but the responsibility to emerge from that misery*. To achieve this, individuals must always utilise personal questioning:

- What is the impact of my state of mind on myself?
- What is my impact on others?
- What can I do to rectify the situation?

The act of questioning and contemplation disrupts the blaming cycle and moves the focus to shifting paradigms and transcending disappointment, anger, sorrow and misery that are just part of life. A society that values well-being should encourage individuals to take a responsible approach to life and provide maximum support to assist individuals in times of need. This requires a culture of happiness as oppose to a culture of pessimism, rivalry and material dependency that characterises our present time.

The notion of responsibility is the spirit of Buddhism that encourages spiritual development and personal mastery built on an interconnected view of human beings, society, nature and the universe. The notion of responsibility is articulated in Buddhist ethics encompassing the precepts and meditation practices. Thus, for example, in a responsibility-based society the right to free speech would become the right to *mindful* speech. An example of interpretation of mindful speech is that of Thich Nhat Hahn (2007:40):

> ... I am committed to cultivating loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am determined to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I will not spread news that I do not know to be certain and will not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break apart. I am determined to make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

Mindful speech is both a right and a responsibility but its essence is that of responsibility because responsibility is superimposed on and guides the use of right. A responsibility-based society fosters a spirit of personal growth that aims to enhance personal well-being and the well-being of society through explicit recognition that they are one and the same, and provides support to every individual to achieve it.

The notion of responsibility is crucial to the drive towards sustainability. Sustainability requires everyone to make the effort. A system of open rights as presently existing is an invitation to abuse. A system of rights without ethics has contributed to rampant exploitation of the natural world. A system
of rights at the international level has lead to nations reneging on their responsibility as evidenced, for example, by the failed efforts to curb carbon emissions. Sustainability requires sacrifice and a willing attitude. This will not be achieved through a system of rights. It will only be achieved when people and nations wake up to the responsibility they owe to themselves, others, future generations and the planet.

**Research agenda**

This proposition is not a research agenda but an ideal. It is an urgent area for philosophical debate to provide principles for living sustainably. In a time of crisis, should people have the right to do whatever they please, or should rights be more limited? If rights are curtailed how would the idea of responsibility transpire in modern society, especially Western society where the idea of responsibility virtually amounts to heresy and is suppressed by the dominant paradigm of laissez-faire in business and personal life? This proposition aims to stimulate a difficult discussion which has yet to materialise in the mainstream. The major characteristics of the proposition are:

- It establishes the path of change as an imperative for achieving sustainability and places the responsibility for implementing that change on each individual, organisation and nation throughout the world.
- It promotes human cohesion by creating a norm, and perhaps a legal framework, that does not exempt any individual, organisation or nation from taking responsible action towards sustainability.
- It is platform for the development of global ethics and shared human values that need to accompany rights as basic tenets for human coexistence.

How such a ‘radical’ proposition for responsibility would be enacted is a matter for debate, future social research and much needed soul-searching in society. Buddhist thinking and practices may prove very helpful as suggested in this study.

**9.3.3 Structural Issues**

Despite the importance of personal sustainability and transformation, resolving structural issues is also critical for global sustainability. Structural issues are by nature humanly created, but once institutionalised they take a life of their own and become major drivers of behaviour of society. Tackling these issues is essential for facilitating change at the personal or societal level. Four structural issues that hinder sustainability are discussed below together with solutions based on a Buddhist approach. These issues are: 1) Inadequacies of democracy, 2) Limited social capacity for achieving sustainability, 3) Lack of freedom and spiritual barrenness and 4) Overpopulation. The research needs
for each are also discussed but their magnitude suggests that a re-orientation of science towards sustainability is first required.

1. Inadequacies of Democracy

While democracy can be regarded as a cornerstone of sustainability, its use is often beset by seemingly intractable problems. Democracy often involves excessive politicking and is marred by direct and indirect corruption, all of which come at the expense of the people especially the poor. Some lessons can be drawn from Buddhism as highlighted in this study.

Firstly, the flourishing of democracy is dependent on the integrity of political leaders. Unfortunately, leaders throughout the world have shown their propensity for self-aggrandisement rather than scrupulousness. The Buddhist perspective espouses humility, honesty, compassion and generosity as key assets of leaders. Democratic societies should consider institutional mechanisms to help ensure that elected leaders possess and maintain these assets. This goes against the prevailing wisdom where the media is solely responsible for scrutiny to provide voters with information. An approach based on Buddhism would take a much more proactive and precautionary stance to guard against the abuse of power. Measures may include:

- subjecting leaders to rigorous examination for biases, fear, weaknesses and aspirations and making the information public.
- continuous monitoring of action and providing the populace with analyses of these action based on the mental profile (especially mental frailties), the idea being to encourage openness in decision-making because the self of leaders is completely transparent to all.
- stipulating that leaders make consistent effort to maintain personal integrity so as to minimise the risk of abuse while in power. Consistent effort could include mindful practice, meditation practice that emphasises compassion, retreat attendance, ethics exploration and the use of techniques to overcome personal ill-predispositions or inappropriate habits.

These measures are derived from the idea that leadership is about sacrifice and selflessness. Leadership is the ultimate act of service to others and therefore leaders must be willing to do whatever it takes, including abandoning the notion of self and ego, to allow them to perform their duty with the utmost purity humanly possible.

Secondly, democracy can only be successful when the notion of citizenship is understood. Citizenship includes rights and responsibilities but, as already discussed, the notion of responsibility is greatly marginalised. While a legal framework exists to ensure rights, there are no legal frameworks to ensure
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responsibility of citizenship. This means that voting is a haphazard affair subjected to whims and sentiments. In other words, people do not have to vote wisely and are often manipulated by politicians through fear, hype or populism. A Buddhist approach would recognise the frailties and insecurities inherent in all people and attempt to provide them with 1) information for informed voting founded on an understanding of true well-being, 2) time for careful deliberation recognising the busy lives people lead, and 3) tools to understand how they can be manipulated and how to deal with it. A Buddhist approach would nurture the responsibilities of citizenship because it recognises that citizenship is a challenging concept that must develop over time with the growth of wisdom in people.

Thirdly, participation is a hallmark of a healthy democracy (Cuthill 2002). Unfortunately, participation has often been shunned by political and bureaucratic leaders around the world because participation involves devolution of power. A Buddhist approach would encourage full participation as illustrated in the idea of sangha or community of monks. Sangha is based on egalitarian ideals: every man, woman and child has equal ability and equal potential for enlightenment. Simply put, it is not how one begins life but the effort and achievement, especially concerning mental development, during life that entitles one to respect. Sangha aims to foster broad, non-dogmatic debate that galvanise cooperative action to achieve community goals and individual well-being. Its vision is something sadly missing in our present society that professes equality but, in fact, engages in domination.

Lastly, truth and trust are the currency of democracy. Unfortunately, the democratic process is mainly composed of shades of lie. From the way candidates portray themselves to the way governments justify action, dishonesty has been de rigueur in democracies. A Buddhist approach would overthrow such unethical behaviour. It would ask for truth … then ask for it again and again. Truth needs to flourish at every level of the democratic process; there can be no excuses or exceptions. This requires the whole of society to take truth seriously and apply truth in every facet of individual and institutional life. It also requires a culture where mistakes and failures are accepted and hence requires open hearts and a willingness to forgive, the opposite of competition-based, cutthroat politics. Buddhism can provide many lessons for establishing democracy in the truest sense of the word: a system for governance and participation that serves humankind and benefits the sustainability of the earth.

2. Limited Social Capacity for Achieving Sustainability

Our society today is faced with the reality of a limited social capacity to achieve sustainability. This has been the result of a fractured social structure that has found no banner to unite under other than the loose umbrella of neo-liberal capitalism. With the present predicament of global unsustainability underpinned by the emerging ecological chaos, humanity no longer has that choice of living disparate
lives. Humanity will either unite or wither and die like countless species before us. We will either make a stand or let nature bring back planetary equilibrium on its terms, humanity ‘kicking and screaming’ like desperate bodies dragged behind horses in some demented torture of yesteryears, before dying of exhaustion, or, in our case, lack of water. If we are to exert any control over our future, the development of capacity to allow sustainability to take course will be of utmost importance. Capacity as highlighted in this study includes a) the ability to think systemically, b) the ability to debate on higher purpose and the meaning of happiness, c) the ability to work with paradigms, and d) the ability to envision a sustainable world and congeal what is left of our might around that vision. The many abilities within this capacity will be required not just at the individual level but the levels of institutions, societies and the global human collective. These abilities are discussed below.

a) Ability to think systemically

Systems thinking has been, and still is, virtually ignored by mainstream society. One can only speculate on the possible reasons: perhaps systems thinking is too taxing for the mind, unintuitive to human nature as Gladwin et al. (1998) have asserted; perhaps monopolistic education has dulled our intellect; or perhaps we are still overshadowed by centuries of compartmentalised science. Whatever the reasons, systems thinking needs to become the de facto way of thinking in every part and at every level of society. Anything less and the hurdles to sustainability will mount, because sustainability will require unremitting, concerted effort. Donella Meadows’ pyramidal framework and the Buddhist perspective, especially the idea of interdependence and interconnectedness, can help bring about systems thinking to the world. However, ultimately, teaching systems thinking must be institutionalised to enable both children and adults to expand beyond their narrow mental confines and this would culminate in the assimilation of systems tenets into the human culture as its modus operandi.

b) Ability to debate purpose and happiness

Sustainability requires human society to come together and debate its purpose and happiness. This project has long been hijacked by neoliberal economics and corrupted by consumerism. Space for debate is urgently needed but part of that space must include silent spots for contemplation and meditation. It is in this space that philosophers, scientists, artists, poets, indigenous folks, spiritual leaders and ordinary people can come together. It is here that different cultures can forge understanding of the most fundamental issues of humanness. It is here that the essence of what constitutes purpose and happiness can be hatched and used as a guiding beacon for endeavours of sustainability. The dharma, as the technology for exploration of the mind and mind states, is one important means for such a debate.

4 Meadows’ framework is presently being used by many organisations through the tools developed by the AtKisson Group. The aim is to foster systemic understanding of sustainability and take action to achieve it. See http://www.atkisson.com/.
c) Ability to work with paradigms

The ability to work with paradigms requires that one step outside a particular paradigm to gain an ‘objective’ perspective. This is the idea of modelling in systems theory and the practice of meditation or mindfulness in Buddhism. Working with paradigms is not something impossibly difficult but is, rather, a habit of stepping outside one’s own mental model with its set of predictable thoughts, feelings, routines and illogic. It is the assertion of this study that the root causes of unsustainability are distorted paradigms based on wrong assumptions. In other words, our view of existence is flawed, our conception of nature is erroneous and the result is a human relationship with one another and nature that is, at best, awkward. The ability to work with paradigms therefore becomes the most essential tool to escape the trap of unsustainability. In the end, we must learn to view ourselves lightly, push away beliefs and thoughts by recognising their fleeting nature, and gain a sense of joy that exists in the preserve of letting go. We must learn to forget the hideous and the ignoble of the past that divide us, because the art of forgetfulness resides in the domain of working with paradigms, and the art of forgetfulness is the key to peace that is the foundation of sustainability.

d) Ability to envision a sustainable world

The move towards sustainability requires imagination. A vision of the world in harmony with nature is what we must seek. Sadly, the ability to envision such futures is weak in this age. Instead of dreaming of utopias, we dream of money, a less than noble undertaking. We must resurrect the ability to imagine that is buried in all human hearts because, as futurist Milojevic (2002:380) argues, “the transformation of our societies is not possible without the transformation of how we see and imagine our common futures”. No naysayer should prevent such channelling of energy that is so crucial in providing impetus for sustainability. We need to continue bravely, realising that naysayers are elites that merely seek to maintain hegemony:

The continuous articulation of utopias and critical engagement with them is important. Stating that utopias are utopian, impossible to achieve, is not a ‘scientific’ statement but a political statement. (Milojevic 2002:379)

Such political statements abound and have prevented the articulation of Buddhist utopias even in so-called Buddhist countries. As Quinn argues, Buddhist utopias would have very different goals for society but yet satisfy the deep longing of all people:

Just as the ultimate aim for the individual in Buddhism is to seek enlightenment, so too Buddhist social policy (if we can call it that) is centred around creating societies that foster spiritual development. This is the bottom line; this is where society should be heading. This may sound overly idealistic but I would argue that it is not. In fact, I would say that to have such an aim is realistic because it equates with what, perhaps at a pretty deep level, people really want, and need. (Q46)
Satisfying the deep longing is what a Buddhist vision of utopia would be all about. A Buddhist society would not orient around market idealism or the notion of rights. Instead, it would provide a cooperative space to ensure the realising of well-being:

Policy formulated in keeping with the commitments of Buddhist practice subordinates freedoms of choice to relating freely, fostering patterns of relationship that culminate in appreciative and contributory virtuosity directed toward increasingly refined and meaningfully shared public good. (Hershock 2004:96)

Unfortunately, virtuosity and shared public good terrify the materialists and, thus, stimulate their suppressive activities. Whether we like it or not, materialist roadblocks will be erected and, most likely, in copious numbers. Those seeking sustainability must surmount these and use hopes, dreams and idealism as tools. Without these, there can be no conviction, no substance, and building a sustainable society will not be possible.

3. Lack of Freedom and Spiritual Barrenness

Modern society has, by and large, not delivered on the promise of true freedom sustainability requires. Education and religion provide the most prominent examples of this failure.

While the aim of education is to deliver learning that allows freedom, it has failed to impart wisdom and understanding relevant to leading a meaningful life. As sixteenth century philosopher, Michel de Montaigne argues:

I gladly come back to the theme of the absurdity of our education: its end has not been to make us good and wise, but learned. And it has succeeded. It has not taught us to seek virtue and to embrace wisdom: it has impressed upon us their derivation and their etymology …

We readily inquire, ‘Does he know Greek or Latin?’ ‘Can he write poetry and prose?’ But what matters most is what we put last: ‘Has he become better and wiser?’ We ought to find out not who understands most but who understands best. We work merely to fill the memory, leaving the understanding and the sense of right and wrong empty. (cited in De Botton 2001:153)

Montaigne’s disappointment in education is still as poignant today as it was four hundred years ago. None of his critique has been addressed. In fact, worse has befallen education: it has largely become a mill for the production of labour to feed capitalism. Despite attempts to orient education around sustainability, most notably through Education for Sustainable Development (see for example, Fien 2002), it remains the practice of creating docile citizens that do not threaten the status quo.

Religion for its part has fared even worse. Despite modernity and all that has happened over the last two centuries, religion still clings to its old ways of asserting dogmas and threatening punishment for
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insubordination. Thus, fanaticism continues to flourish throughout the world in every religion. True spirituality is, however, a far cry from religion. In fact, religion, with its insistence on ‘the right way of doing things’ that amounts to indoctrination, can be viewed as the antithesis of spirituality:

Religion … tell[s] you to believe. Believing means: Don’t think, don’t play with ideas. Don’t try to find out on your own. Jesus has already found it, Buddha has already said it – why should you be unnecessarily concerned? Then naturally that part that makes a man an Einstein does not develop: You remain average. And average means the basement of humanity. (Osho 2004:47)

True spirituality embraces freedom, and that necessarily entails exploration not faith or acceptance. True spirituality is the art of not believing in anything until it becomes known, understood, grasped and assimilated through experience, contemplation and meditation over the long span of a lifetime. It cannot be taught, given or handed down. It is about breaking free from structural confinements and ideologies that hold us captive and limit our potentials.

The sickness in education and religion are partly responsibility for the debacle of unsustainability that we find ourselves in. The bifurcation of spirituality and education is a tragedy that religion created and one that needs to be addressed. Spirituality is essential in education as it is in any aspect of life. Education being an important part of mental growth cannot ignore spirituality because this amounts to undermining the basis of life’s action. Buddhism offers much insight for the development of spirituality. Buddhism is often regarded as a religion but its essence, the dharma, is not. The dharma discards all dogmas, all beliefs, all thoughts in favour of emptiness. From this emptiness we can see the world with ‘clear eyes’. Thus, the dharma is a spiritual practice that has no form and is devoid of humanly created values. It is experienced at the deepest level, shuns hegemony, undermines all that come before, and pursues liberty from one mind-moment to the next.

4. Overpopulation

Population is admittedly a most difficult issue because of its long association with religion. Nevertheless the question must be posed: Must humans procreate in a time of crisis when the world needs less people not more? If we examine our paradigmatic assumptions, discard social conditioning and answer honestly we might come up with propositions similar to these:

a) The population of the world should be reduced until planetary equilibrium is reached.

b) Humans must first consider their responsibility to their children, humanity and the state of planet first before assuming the right to procreate.

These propositions, though thought-provoking and challenging to implement, are sensible options given the direness of the situation. The first asks for sacrifice because the human population has spiralled in
the last century. We must also face the fact that population cannot grow indefinitely in a finite world – this has been the sustainability argument all along (Meadows, Meadows & Randers 1992; Meadows et al 1972). Sooner or later, growth will have to stop but whether it will be through choice or through the wrath of the earth is up to us. The argument would be that we should curb population now in the small window of opportunity that we have rather than be forced to do so. The proposition also concerns the idea that humanity should emphasise qualitative development rather than quantitative development, something Buddhism wholly supports.

The second proposition tackles the notion of rights as already discussed earlier. It asks us to put responsibility first, and ponder the consequences, before exercising the right to bear children. For example, a potential parent should consider these issues (my opinion in parentheses):

- the survival chance of a child given the present environment of unsustainability (deteriorating quickly)
- the likely quality of life of future generations (significantly lower)
- the impact in terms of ecological footprint of a child in a world of shrinking resources and exploding demand (any new footprint is one too many considering the stress on ecosystems)
- whether happiness is really dependent on having children (a Buddhist might argue that the reality is the opposite, but this a subject for honest debate)

Humans are not an ordinary species but one with a unique consciousness and a gift for potentially realising planetary utopia. Alas, we also have the capability for total annihilation. We should not postpone this difficult decision on population. Through means such as Buddhist practices of contentment and intelligent abstinence, we can overcome excessive libido, despotic religious doctrines and conditioning, and ignorance of inner forces that control our every move, and come to term with the idea of population reduction that would alleviate the suffering of countless future generations of humans and animals.

### 9.3.4 Science and Sustainability

So many questions on sustainability remain for science to answer. For example, understanding the earth as a system will tax scientists for centuries to come. This study has highlighted many research agendas especially for cognitive and social sciences concerning personal sustainability, human transformation and a host of structural issues ranging from leadership, social capacity, religion, education to population. Simply put, we know very little about the natural ecology of the earth, the ecology of human society, the inner ecology of the mind, and the relationship between all three.
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Science does not lack the means or resources to address these gaps in our knowledge. What it lacks is focus. Science has been obsessed with technology, has fallen in love with the power to control nature (or so it was once thought possible) and has been enchanted by useless intellectual curiosities. This has come at the expense of real human well-being and sustainability. If science is to gain a worthy place in history, other than the ignominy of a tool for mass extinction, it must reconsider its raison d’être. The assertion here is that science must serve sustainability – the sustainability of life on earth and human society within it - first and foremost. Science must always be subjected to intense ethical and philosophical scrutiny and this should apply to all branches of science and applied science.

Since some branches of science consider themselves outside the realm of ethics (P.A. Payutto 1993), they have little accountability - not to the human race, but only to those who fund their research. Science as such is the science of madness. For example, chemistry has been responsible for pollution that will last millions of years to come. Engineering has produced infrastructure and weapons technology that have created much human misery. Genetics has contrived genetic modifications with uncertain risks for the environment. Economics and business research have ignored the false assumptions which they operate under to propagate the ‘more and more’ syndrome. The list could go on. In opposition, Buddhism states that nothing is beyond the realm of ethics because nothing is outside the causal chain. That is to say, there are ethical consequences for every action, scientific or otherwise. To believe anything else is delusional. Science has lost its clarity, now in servitude of money and self-aggrandisement, and is in disarray. Science must change.

The importance of methodology has been sorely missing in much of science. Rectifying this situation could lead the way to a rebirth of science. Most natural and applied sciences simply ignore methodological concerns. Even in the social sciences, “the [methodological] approaches are rarely declared explicitly in research reports, and many researchers have only a vague awareness of them” (Neuman 2003:68-69). Methodology is the philosophy of research and necessarily includes ontology and epistemology (Van Manen 1990). Ontology explores the nature of reality and being, and epistemology examines what can constitute knowledge. Neglecting methodology is to neglect the philosophical and existential foundations of research, and subsequently, to neglect the social and political contexts and assumptions which build on them. In other words, research conducted within a methodological vacuum has no meaning or relevance to the human journey other than to continue hegemonic traditions, however blind or senseless. To be of service to humanity, all scientific research and its application must engage with discourses in ontology, epistemology and the politics of our time. As this study has asserted, this engagement must now take place under the umbrella of sustainability.
The sustainability umbrella this study has presented is holistic and systemic. It is holistic in that it recognises that all human affairs should serve human well-being that is derived from the social and ecological health of the planet. It is systemic in that it emphasises the relationship between the components in sustainability. Thus, it is hard to envision how the findings of this study could be used in any way other than to further human enlightenment. This cannot be said for much of scientific research. It would be wise for the whole of science to consider congregating under such an umbrella and emphasise thoughtful methodologies. It may be the only way to remedy the situation that might be called ‘the tragedy of science’.

**9.3.5 Challenges for Personal Action of Sustainability Leaders**

Two pressing questions for sustainability leaders arise from this study:

*Will humanity continue to slide down a precipice that will tear our hopes and aspirations asunder?*

*Is the world doomed?*

Given that the world’s leadership is in the hands of old men stuck in a sordid storyline of growth and greed, and that great civilisations have self-destructed before because of environmental neglect, the answer to the first must be a resounding ‘quite possibly’ and the second a chilling ‘maybe’. Fortunately, we are not there yet. A small window of opportunity still exists (although our limited understanding of systems precludes any definite conclusion). Drawing from the lessons in this study, what can leaders of the sustainability movement do?

Firstly, we need to start believing, and never let anybody tell us otherwise, that humans and society can change. Donella Meadows, the mother of systemic sustainability, in her last written work makes a rallying cry to dispel the myth of ineptitude:

Heck, I don't know. There's only one thing I do know. If we believe that it's effectively over, that we are fatally flawed, that the most greedy and short-sighted among us will always be permitted to rule, that we can never constrain our consumption and destruction, that each of us is too small and helpless to do anything, that we should just give up and enjoy our SUVs while they last -- well, then yes, it's over. That's the one way of believing and behaving that gives us a guaranteed outcome.

Personally, I don't believe that stuff at all. I don't see myself or the people around me as fatally flawed. Everyone I know wants polar bears and three-year-olds in our world. We are not helpless and there is nothing wrong with us except the strange belief that we are helpless and there's something wrong with us. All we
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need to do, for the bear and ourselves, is to stop letting that belief paralyze our minds, hearts, and souls. (Meadows 2001)

Meadows’ conviction mirrors Buddhism’s optimism in human capacity. There is nothing that willing minds cannot do. Deep in our hearts we should know that we can live in peace with each other and nature. We must know that the cause of our predicament, including the attitude of gloom, is merely the result of holding on to false paradigms, and that the solution lies in discarding these and building new ones that represent a sustainable future. Quite simply, the solution is in our mind - always has been. It is never too late to begin.

Secondly, we must take a multitude of personal actions as citizenry of sustainability. By doing so, we start taking responsibility and stop blaming others; we start with ourselves and let our action speak. Here is a simple scheme of actions that could be regarded as ‘an ethics for sustainability’. It is divided into five themes and includes examples of possible action:

1. Environment
To risk stating the obvious, environmental actions are absolute necessary and they should increase in number and effectiveness as new solutions emerge. Therefore we should as much as possible:

- conserve and re-use
- consume less
- use natural, biodegradable products and materials
- buy and grow organic food
- reduce meat consumption
- compost
- think systemically and globally
- always look for new ways to live in harmony with nature

There are a host of things that we can do and many useful resources available (see for example, Steffen 2006). There are no more excuses to procrastinate.

2. Society
A move towards sustainability requires the leaders of the movement to heal the wounds within society and bring cohesion. This is the formation of social capital that is vital to transformation. The contribution to social capital can only be done through personal action and encouraging others to follow suit. These are examples of what could be done:
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- generate trust through commitment to truth and personal integrity whatever the circumstances
- foster a culture of care in the family and repair damaged relationships
- develop empathy, reduce ego and create goodwill in the workplace
- abstain from alcohol consumption that destroys people, family and society
- give to others, volunteer time
- live a life built on ecological and spiritual ethics

We cannot win a ‘war’ against proponents of unsustainability who often use rhetorical, psychological and physical violence. Only through means of love and forbearance can we convince and unite friends and foes, and show the world what humanity is capable of. We must demonstrate through social action that a cooperative culture that asks for effort, aims for the sublime and yet does not neglect the little things in life can be created. That is what the project of sustainability is all about.

3. Economics

Though it is impossible to do so completely, leaders of sustainability must disengage from the dominant economic paradigm that is the major theoretical and systemic cause of unsustainability. Here are examples of steps that could be taken:

- downshift to a simple life and set an example to others
- work in a profession that promotes sustainability or does not in any way contribute to social and environmental degradation
- consume and invest ethically
- support alternative ways of economics such as Local Exchange Trading Schemes (LETS), microfinance and community banks

While there are significant compromises, these steps would help undermine the dominance of neo-liberal economics. Leaders of sustainability must always keep in mind the necessity of a complete revolution in economics to achieve sustainability.

4. Structures and institutions

The action of leaders of sustainability can bring about shifts in structures and changes in institutions. Examples of action include:

\[5\] Thich Nhat Hahn (2007) tells us that 1) we waste much grain and fruit to make alcohol instead of feeding people, and 2) drinking alcohol normalises a behaviour that has brought havoc to many families and societies. Simply put, there is no responsible drinking; only marketing has fooled us into thinking so.
• vote wisely
• consider other options other than procreation
• confront consumerism
• speak out for sustainability
• participate in community initiatives
• work with formal and informal organisations involved in sustainability

These actions can be catalytic in structural and institutional reforms.

5. Personal sustainability and wisdom

Finally, the essence of sustainability leadership resides in the hearts and minds of all of us. Ironically, sustainability leadership involves following: following the footsteps of men and women who have shown us the real meaning of what humanity stands for. Thus, it is to follow Martin Luther King and Gandhi for their uncompromised belief in peace. It is to follow Mother Theresa for her extraordinary generosity. It is to follow the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hahn for their indefatigable compassion in the face of oppression. It is to follow Jesus who stood up for the rights and freedom of the meek and the humble. It is to follow the Buddha for his wisdom to relieve the suffering of mundane existence. Here are a few things we can do to follow their path:

• endeavour to overcome negative conditionings such as fear, anger and animosity that rule the world
• strive for ethical ideals, to overthrow addictions and habits
• practice compassion and kindness to everyone we meet
• lead a mindful life based on receptivity and stillness
• live by just being, casting away all paradigms including sustainability and spirituality

To practice sustainability is to practice personal development. However, personal development is a paradox. It involves taking action and adopting new thinking, but it also entails letting go. It is but a process of going back and forth between the conventional realm and the ultimate realm; that is, between where suffering exists and where nothing exists. This process reveals history: humans come and go; civilisations flower and flounder; planets form and are destroyed; universes that seemingly span infinitely begin and then wither. It reminds us that we are but a speck of consciousness in the vast unfolding of time. In this context, sustainability is as much about doing as it is about just being - in the moment.
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APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Buddhist Perspectives on Sustainability

This sheet provides the details of the research project, contact information and other relevant information. Please retain this for future reference or should you wish to contact the researcher or the University for any reason including complaints on conduct of the research.

Name of Researcher: Chaiyatorn T. Suwan
School: Australian School of Environmental Science, Griffith University, Australia

Contact details:

**Thailand**
6 Navathanee soi 11
Sukhapiban 2 road
Bangkok 10230
Thailand
Tel: 02 731-8974 to 5
Mobile: 01 307 1169

**Australia**
25 Merry St
Bulimba
QLD 4171
Australia
Tel: 07 3395 7799
Mobile: 0421 514 847

**E-mails**
chaiyatorn.tsuwan@student.gu.edu.au
citsuwan@hotmail.com

Background
This research is conducted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Environmental Science at Griffith University under the supervision of:
- Professor John Fien (main)
- Dr. William Metcalf, Adjunct Lecturer
- Dr. Michael Cuthill, Senior Researcher, Gold Coast City Council
- Alan AtKisson, CEO of AtKisson Inc. (sustainability consultancy)
Purpose of Research
The aim of the research is to explore the contributions of Buddhism to the concept of sustainability and its application in modern society. Sustainability has become an increasingly important concept in recent developmental discourse and has been adopted in varying degrees by many countries throughout the world. Its interpretation is often diverse but usually contains three major themes: environment, economy and society. However, it is invariably viewed through a Western philosophical outlook from which it emerged and is often adopted by governments using traditional development approaches. This research focuses on re-interpreting the meaning of sustainability through the eyes of individuals practicing Buddhism in both Thailand and Australia and seeks to understand how their vision, values and behaviour can help shape alternative meanings of sustainability, and how these can assist to transform our global societies. It does this through the interview technique where participants are invited to share the beliefs, ideas and experiences while exploring their own behaviour and possible tension while leading a ‘modern’ life. A group discussion may also be conducted to facilitate an exchange of information to galvanise potential social actions.

Benefits of Research
• Facilitate discussion on Buddhist sustainability, its application in development – this is a normative process for establishing the legitimacy of Buddhism in development discourse.
• Attempts to gauge the real-world contribution of Buddhists to sustainability.
• Allows personal exploration of Buddhism through reflection.
• Facilitate networking, group action toward social change.

Participation
• Participation for this research is voluntary and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant might otherwise entitled, and that the participant may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or without providing an explanation.
• Should you approve, participation in this research will involve interviewing, observation and document analysis:
  1) Interviewing
You will be interviewed at a time and location convenient to you. General and specific questions will be asked concerning your life and Buddhism. Although there are themes to be explored as documented by the literature, new or different topics may be raised and discussed where appropriate. You may decline to answer any question deemed inappropriate in any sense; utmost sensitivity will be taken to ensure proper respect. In addition to formal interview sessions, other informal conversations relevant to the research subject will be considered interviews. But the latter will depend on your approval – this will be explicit and the method of conduct obvious. Conversations will not be recorded covertly in any manner.
  2) Observation
The researcher(s) will note aspects of your behaviour during the interviews and at other times where permission is granted. This is not to pry on your
private affairs but rather to observe the way you lead your life in accordance with the principles of Buddhism. However, under no circumstances will private or sensitive areas be intruded. The researcher(s) will respect the privacy of any affairs deemed personal in the event that these take place during the visit. These can be specified by you before or after the event, or, should the researcher(s) remain unsure of the status, he will ask for clarification. Again, all acts of observation will be overt and carried out in the spirit of cooperation and respect.

3) Document analysis
The researcher(s) will investigate any document (in any forms) they receive from you. This is to examine how these relate to subject of research, namely, Buddhism and sustainability.

- Should you have any query on how you will be participating please contact the team before the start using the contact information supplied.

Risk
- Participation in this research poses no risks as the research only seeks personal perspectives for theory development

Confidentiality
- The information given at all stages will be treated as confidential or as according to the wishes of the participant. All data will be kept locked in filing cabinets for 5 years before being destroyed in accordance with Griffith University requirements.
- The researcher will seek permission for any use or future uses of information given.

Feedback
- All participants will be given feedback from the research in a number of ways:
  1) Transcript
     Interviews will be transcribed and a copy sent to the participants. Two weeks will be given for verification, modification or comments. Any item or section can be modified or deleted. Any special request can be made.
  2) Interpretation
     Upon completion, a draft copy of the final analysis and discussion will be sent to each participant. Any comments, suggestions or requests are welcome.
  3) Final results/research findings
     A summary report that highlights the key findings of the research will be sent to each participant. The full report can also be requested.

Complaints and Misconduct
- Any concerns or serious issues on the conduct of the research can be taken up with the University at:
the University's Research Ethics Officer, Office for Research, Bray Centre, Griffith University, Kessels Road, Nathan, Qld 4111, Australia, telephone (07) 3875 6618;

or

the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Bray Centre, Griffith University, Kessels Road, Nathan, Qld 4111, Australia telephone (07) 3875 7343

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (a)

I have read the information sheet and the consent form. I agree to participate in the research entitled 'Buddhist Perspectives on Sustainability', and give my consent freely. I understand that the research will be carried out as described in the information statement, a copy of which I have retained. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate is my decision and will not affect this research. I also realise that I can withdraw from the research at any time and that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing. I have had all questions answered to my satisfaction.

Signatures:

………………………………………………..  ……………………
Participant (Chaiyatorn T.Suwan)  Date

………………………………………………..  ……………………
Investigator (Chaiyatorn T.Suwan)  Date
APPENDIX 2: EXAMPLE INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

**Interview Schedule A**
This is the interview schedule used for Kacy, one of the earlier interviews. It was designed as a general guide for my stay at her house. The actual interview bears little resemblance to it because I discovered that I had to change many questions during the interviews and create new ones for the next session. Bullet points represent probes or points to look out for.

**PART 1(a): Buddhism**
*This part is about your experience with Buddhism.*

a) When did you start practicing Buddhism?
   • reasons for taking up Buddhism?

b) What does your dharma practice consist of?
   • everyday life?
   • retreats?

c) In what ways have Buddhism and dharma practice impacted your life?

**PART 1(b)**
*This part deals with notions of happiness, well-being and purpose in life and the influence of dharma.*

a) What is your ultimate purpose in life?
   • Why? How derived?
   • Change with Buddhism from previous goals?
   • Examples of behaviour

b) How do you plan to achieve your purpose?

c) What are your thoughts on the idea of enlightenment?

d) Describe what happiness is to you?
   • How did you view happiness before encountering Buddhism?

e) How do you achieve this happiness?

f) Do you ever feel fear or loneliness?
   • How do you cope with it?
PART 2: Society
This part deals with your social relationship and the impact of Buddhism.

a) Can you tell me about Buddhist ethics (i.e. the precepts) in your tradition of Buddhism?

b) What impact has BUDDHIST ETHICS (the precepts) had on your life?
   • Go through some of the precepts
   • Behavioural implications? Behavioural change?

c) Has Buddhism affected your relationship with other people?
   • Family: parents, children, brother/sisters, relatives
     o Strength of bonds (change?)
     o Activities undertaken
   • Friends
     o Characteristics of relationship (e.g. trust, help)
     o Type of people chosen
   • Competitors or people you don't like
     o Relationship & behaviour towards them (change, deterioration, improvement)

d) What is your view of HAVING CHILDREN?
   • Dharma’s influence?
   • Why did you not start a family?

PART 3: Economy
This part concerns economic activities and the environment

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ECONOMY

a) Can you tell me about the changes in your life with regards to WORK and living?

b) Was Buddhism an influence in your decisions to change lifestyle?

c) Before, when you were working full time, did Buddhism or dharma practice impact your work?
   • Type of work, way of doing and purpose
   • Look for change that has occurred?
   • Has the meaning of work changed?
CONSUMPTION

d) Has the dharma influenced the way you consume?
   • Change? Compared to before Buddhism.

MONEY

e) What is the importance of money to you?
   • Has this changed?
If time and appropriate:
   • Explore the tensions/conflicts Kacy might be experiencing between the
     practice and beliefs of Buddhism and her everyday involvement in the
     economy (work, money, consumption, etc.)?
   • How have these been resolved?

PART 4: Nature
This section deals with the way you relate with nature. Nature means the natural
world (animals, trees, the land) – we relate directly and indirectly with it.

a) Has Buddhism impacted the way you view nature?
   • non-killing
   • compassion
   • restorative action, environmental action
   • consumption
   • behavioural change

b) When and why did you become a vegetarian?
**Interview Schedule B**

This is the interview schedule used for Frank, one of the last interviews. It was designed for two hours of conversation.

**PART 1: Buddhism**
*This part is about your experience with Buddhism.*

a) What lead you to take up Buddhism?

b) What does the practice of Zen Buddhism involve for you?

**PART 2: Tools for Transformation**

c) Have there been any profound experiences that have had an impact on the way you view yourself or the way you view the world?

d) Has Zen changed your life?

**PART 3: Well-Being and Purpose**
*This part deals with notions of happiness, well-being and purpose in life and the influence of dharma. (PERSONAL IMPLICATION rather than THEORY!)*

**HAPPINESS**

a) What HAPPINESS is to you?
   • How do you achieve this happiness?

b) How do you personally deal with the opposites e.g. FEAR, LONELINESS and DIFFICULT EXPERIENCES (PAST & PRESENT)?

**PURPOSE & COSMOLOGY (nature of universe)**

c) What is your ULTIMATE PURPOSE in life?
   • How do you plan to achieve your purpose/goals?

d) What do you think of the idea of ENLIGHTENMENT?
   • What does it mean to you?

e) What is the significance of the concepts of NON-SELF and KARMA in your life?
PART 4: Ethics, Society, Economics & Environment
This part deals with Buddhist ethics in relation to social, economic and environmental outlook and behaviour.

BUDDHIST ETHICS

a) Can you tell me about your interpretation of Buddhist ethics?
   • How do you apply the precepts in daily life?

SOCIETY, ECONOMY & ENVIRONMENT

b) Has Zen made an impact on your social relations i.e. the way you relate to other people?
   • If so how? (family, friends, competitors, people you may not like …)
   • EXAMPLES of BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES?

c) What is your view of HAVING CHILDREN?
   • Has Zen had an influence?

d) Have Zen influenced the way you consume?
   • Change? Compared to before Buddhism

e) Are you a vegetarian?
This appendix contains the interview transcripts, e-mail correspondence, field notes and other relevant data. All transcripts were transcribed from the interview by the researcher. Each page number begins with the first letter of the participant’s name. Field notes given in this section are selected for relevancy only.

For Thai participants, calendar years are given according to Buddhist Era (B.E.) which is 543 years earlier than Christian Era (A.D.). For example, 2005 A.D. is equivalent to 2548 B.E.
ZARA

*Interview*

Part 1 (9 May 2005)

Interviewer: Can you tell me your reasons for seeking Buddhism?

Zara: Basically because I was not satisfied with my life as I knew it. I have three brothers, mother, father and I grew up in New Zealand, and had a good New Zealand upbringing. There were no major traumas in my life but I felt there was something more to life than just growing up, getting married, having children, growing old and die! So ... and I didn't want to do that. So I travelled. I remembered when I was in Spain and the thought occurred to me one night, you know, I wonder if I'd ever find it? And I never knew that I was looking for anything. And sometimes people would come up to me and they'd start talking and automatically say, 'Tell me when you've found what you're looking for.' And so it happened that I was in India and I was with a friend and we went to visit a mutual friend who was staying at Igatpuri which is Dhamma Giri which is the main centre for vipassana in the world. And in those days they weren't having courses in the monsoon season. So they said there was a course in Rajasthan, why don't you do it? And at that point in time, my friend and I, we weren't talking to each other – hated each other, we were having a really hard time. And ... he said, “Yes, I'll do it,” and I looked at him and thought, “But you’re so intellectual and not coping why would you possibly want to do it?” and I thought, “If you do it, I'll do it.” We went up there and both sat the course and it had a profound impact on my life.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Zara: After the course I felt ... the only way to describe it is that I've come home. My friend and I all ... any remnants of animosity and anger toward each other had evaporated by the end of the course and we were very dear friends again, and very happy. And I found, basically, that it appealed to me because I didn’t have to have a belief in anything and yet it dealt with the human condition which was dealing with misery, suffering and, while religion in many aspects offers some succour, I suppose, toward some of the things that bother us in life, they don't actually resolve the suffering for us; only we can resolve that ourselves. So I did my first course and my life turned from there.

Interviewer: And that first course, was that a Goenka course?

Zara: A Goenka 10-day retreats in Dhamma Thali, a centre in Rajasthan.

Interviewer: I see. What happened from there with your practice?
Zara: Ah well, I realised that if I went back to New Zealand I’d fall into my same old habits. So I went down and stayed at Dhamma Giri at Igatpuri. It was past the monsoon season now; it was winter and they ran courses in winter. So I spent 3 or 4 months there and then friends that I had there that I had met through vipassana said they were going to Japan to teach English, and there was a good, strong group of old students there. And they were having gypsy camps courses there too – there was no centre there. So they said why don’t you come and I said that’s a good idea. So I went to Japan via Burma and then sat a 20-day self course at Sayagi centre – so that was still open and running even though he [U Ba Kin] has since passed away. And there I went to Japan.

Interviewer: What was that again?

Zara: IMC Rangoon [referring to the vipassana centre in Rangoon]

Interviewer: Oh, you went to Rangoon first?

Zara: Yes, on the way to Japan. And then I ... We had a dharma house near Kyoto. And a dharma house is, basically, a place where if you’ve done a course, you can go there and do a self course ... if you’re an old student or a 10-group sitting, and that just supports you in your practice. So I lived close to the dharma house and I had lots of lovely friends around me. So we kept working and sitting, and also we would have also run 2-3 courses while I was there. I supported those in some ways.

Interviewer: So you were teaching English?

Zara: Yes.

Interviewer: Are you a qualified teacher?

Zara: I’m not a qualified teacher, No. And the wonderful thing is – I’ll just deviate slightly here – because when you’re in Japan you’ll meet Japanese students with Scottish accent, English accent, American accent [laughs]. So no I wasn’t qualified but at the same time they had textbooks and what not. My background was secretarial and I’d done a short business studies course.

Interviewer: What does your practice involve now?

Zara: OK, my practice now involves – it’s a very practical technique – so it involves meditation. I meditate an hour in the morning and I meditate an hour in the evening. My practice involves keeping the 5 precepts which support my practice of course, and that is not to kill, not to steal, not to commit sexual misconduct, not to lie and not to take intoxicants. Once a year, because of my family commitments/householder’s commitments – my daughter is 13, my son is 8, so I can only do a 10-day self course once every year. When I have time I’ll do longer courses again. But I can’t do that at the moment. So it incorporates into my life beautifully.
Interviewer: So what about during the day?

Zara: Well you see the thing is, when you practice, what happens is you start activating anicca which is the awareness of sensations within the body. So what happens is, as you maintain the practice of an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, it starts to flow over into everyday life. So even though you’re not sitting on the mat with your eyes closed, for example, I’m sitting here talking to you and my attention is on the outside, but part of my attention is on the inside. So I’m very aware of my sensations at this present time, so what’s going on in the inside. So it flows over, spills over into the everyday life.

Interviewer: Has the practice always been the Goenka technique of vipassana?

Zara: Yes, I think, from my understandings, there are over 2,000 different ways of practicing vipassana alone. And I believe very strongly, and also based on my own experience of working with other people I’ve come into contact with on the technique, that it’s better to find a path that suits you and stick to it and grow and develop in that particular path. Now it can be whether one practices the technique as taught be Mahasi Sayadaw which is different again to the technique as taught by S. N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagi, or it’s another technique of vipassana. But I think there’s no point jumping around because otherwise you’re become confused. Because one teacher will say, “We practice anapana this way” and another will say, “We practice this way” and another will say, “We practice it this way”. So if you find a technique and it gives you result here and now and it’s not blind faith, it has to translate into everyday life - do it. ... Yes, so it is in this technique and tradition [of Goenka].

Interviewer: Can you explain the concept of the Goenka technique, when you sit on a mat?

Zara: OK. So you basically start, when someone comes to a course for 10 days, you observe the five precepts scrupulously. That will give you a strong foundation. The first three-and-a-half days is anapana which is concentration of the mind and in this particular tradition you work at the base of the nostrils above the upper lip. So with this area here, first of all you start with the inside of the nostrils and you’re aware of every breath as it goes in, every breath as it goes out. And you’re aware of the touches of breath. And then as the mind becomes more and more focused and sharper and more and more settled, then you move to the smaller area here, this triangular area here below the nose above the upper lip. And at that point you are able to feel the chemical reactions happening within the skin from moment to moment. So you’re feeling sensations, whatever they may be – you’re not trying to concentrate it. So you work with that for four days. That sufficiently sharpens and concentrates the mind. And on the fourth day we move into vipassana which just simply means, as you know, to see things as they are – without craving, aversion or ignorance. Just to accept them as they are. So you start from the top of the head and you feel whatever sensations. People start off usually on the surface of the skin. They’re aware of the touch of
the atmosphere or the touch of the cloth or it may just be they get an itching or a pressure or anything like that. And as they move systematically through the body, then the awareness starts to penetrate and they can feel things happening at a deeper level. And they learn that it doesn’t matter whether the experience is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Just observe! That’s all.

Interviewer: What about emotions when they come up?

Zara: Emotions, nothing arises in the mind without a sensation in the body. So what happens normally in everyday life, if an event occurs and you have strong reaction to that, of either craving or aversion, you usually intellectualise it: “I like it, I like it” or “I don’t like it”, “That person is a terrible person”. And what we do is we keep replaying that event depending on the intensity of it on the stage of our mind for the rest of our lives. And so what we do is we generate very deep conditions of hatred or very deep conditions of craving. Whereas what happens once you observe at the level of sensations ... now look at this ... sensations are very intense, there’s a lot of heat in the body, arising passing, arising passing ... oh look, it’s gone ... something else has come up. So by observing it at the level of sensations, you’re not rolling in it. That particular conditioning, whether it's craving or aversion, you’re not suppressing it but you’re just experiencing it as it is. And it arises just like when a big rain cloud comes, it drops its rain and passes. Nothing is permanent, and this is the other thing that you start to experience in this technique. Everything is arising and passing away. There’s nothing to hold on to; it’s the nature of existence, of the mind.

Interviewer: OK in terms of your personal experience in daily life, when you experience sensations such as heat or whatever, are you saying that emotions do not arise?

Zara: Well they do arise. I mean, we’re emotional beings. We’re very emotional beings. But it’s wisdom. It’s experiencing those emotions as sensations with wisdom. So, in other words, sensations are nothing but a reflection of what’s arising in the mind at that particular moment. Now, while you’re sitting there and an intense sensation is arising in the body and you experiencing it as arising and passing, it is not just one sensation. You’re experiencing it as an arising and passing; it’s like a stream, a stream of energy arising and passing, arising and passing. So you’re actually ... not rolling in your emotions. You're experiencing them as sensations. And every now and then, depending on the intensity, your thoughts will go to a particular incident. You’ll see the face of a person and you’ll start to generate that anger. You start to “Oh, what a ...” and then you come back to sensation. And again the mind will go back to thoughts and keep bringing back to sensation. It’s not that the mind – this is on a superficial level when you’re learning – wants to go to sensations, it won’t stay there. The nature of the mind is to roll in these thoughts. So it’s like a little puppy dog. You start and it’s a very slow process. But eventually it does learn to follow instructions more or less.
Interviewer: So in daily life, supposing your children drive you mad and the thoughts go out and you see emotions there, would you bring it back to sensations?

Zara: You see what happens, well, you can’t miss you sensations because your sensations are screaming at you. You know when you’re angry, your whole body is full of heat and tightness and your jaws are tight. And the whole body tenses up. So you can’t miss your sensations [laughs]. And what happens is it’s not that it will just happen overnight. It will be, for example, if you were a very angry person you might be angry for 9 hours out of 10. And you keep practicing being angry for 8 hours out of 10 [in meditation]. So it gets less and less. It’s not something that you come out of immediately. And there are times in your every day life when, yes, you are going to react strongly but the reaction isn’t going to be for so long and you feel equanimous because this is the other key aspect of the technique, is equanimity ... in other words, when you experience your sensations, equanimity, balance of mind neither liking nor disliking. I can give you a good example. My first husband passed away. OK. So we’d just finished giving a course and he wasn’t breathing properly and he wasn’t remembering words and I thought something was not right here. So I phone the neurologist and he went down and had the scan. We were saying, well, we’ve been on an investigative journey and it’s probably just burn out. Went to lunch. Came back and put the scan up. And there’s this massive tumour that filled the left-hand side of his brain. It was a huge cyst on it. And we were off to New Zealand to give a course the next day, a 10-day course. Obviously, that got cancelled. It was interesting because when I heard that and I had to phone a friend who was living in Sydney at the time, “Could we possibly stay with them?” because my husband had to go to hospital. And I just completely broke down, crying and what not. I couldn’t even get the words out and my husband who just took the phone off me very calmly and said to our friend, “Look this is what’s happened.” Anyway it was really interesting because when I heard that and I had to phone a friend who was living in Sydney at the time, “Could we possibly stay with them?” because my husband had to go to hospital. And I just completely broke down, crying and what not. I couldn’t even get the words out and my husband who just took the phone off me very calmly and said to our friend, “Look this is what’s happened.” Anyway it was really interesting because ... So we got him settled and I went back to their place that night. And it was interesting because, as soon as I sat down to meditate, this wonderful ... it was like being suffused with peace. Just peace settled down. The mind became very calm, very peaceful and it wasn’t at an intellectual level; it was at a physical level. And that was something that stayed with me for the entire six weeks of his illness up until his death. And even when he died there was no crying or grieving or anything like that. I kept thinking that something’s wrong here. You know, I should be crying. But I felt so totally at peace with the whole thing. Not only that but I think I grew a lot through that experience because life teaches you. But normally what happens, we’re so busy jumping up and down and, you know, rolling in our emotions that we don’t see the reality of life as it manifests itself.

Interviewer: So what would you credit that to?

Zara: Totally with the technique, yes. It’s not something ... when you’re in a situation like that it’s not something that you can intellectually override. You know when you are faced with a situation like that, well, you can’t say I’m going to be peaceful. It doesn’t work that way. So I realised ... and, for me, I think that was
very important ... is that if the technique doesn’t translate into your everyday life and you’re not getting benefits from it, why do it?

Interviewer: Right. Can you describe some peak experiences in your practice?

Zara: I’d say there’s no peak. It’s ongoing and it’s a cumulative thing. I know that when in the early days I was giving nine courses a year with my husband and sitting a 30-day course, the tangible benefits of the technique were much more obvious because of the amount of time spent in meditation. I suppose you liken it to the physical body. Everyday you have to give the physical body a bath. Otherwise it accumulates dirt and what not. And it’s the same with the mind. So at that time my mind was very clear and I was very equanimous. Now I meditate in the morning and evening and do one 10-day course a year. So the equanimity is certainly developing because it has to, I mean. And it’s wonderful to have that base of meditation there. So I think that it’s an ongoing process. There’s no big flag waving kind of episodes or anything like that. You have different experiences in your meditation but they’re not regarded as ‘This is it’. I think that the whole technique across all concepts of the Buddha’s teaching, the whole concept is to work toward your own enlightenment.

Interviewer: I just asked that because some people have profound experiences.

Zara: Oh you can have profound experiences. I’ve had profound but I don’t regard those as important. They’re not really, you know ... you can have profound but it is like, I suppose, having a wonderful experience but you can’t hold on to it, can you? It’s in the past. It’s a memory.

Interviewer: Could you tell me if there are any experiences which changed the way you view things?

Zara: I’d say that first course. That first course was a catalyst. And from then on ... and so many wonderful experiences. But that was the catalyst for me, that first course.

Interviewer: Maybe you can describe a little bit what happened and the kind of changes you felt.

Zara: OK. I can do that. So the first course, it was very easy to be able to focus the awareness, and the sensations were extremely clear. I think by day 4 I experienced what’s known in the technique as ‘bunga’. So, that is, you’re sitting there and you’re meditating but the whole body just totally – there’s no inside, outside, no observer, no observed. Everything just dissolves into a massive sensation, arising and passing. So you get to see experiences [of the] body in a way that you haven’t experienced it before. On a physical level, it was very interesting because I’d always had chest problems. So on a physical level what was happening is that I’d had chest problems and I was coughing, continually coughing. It actually got to the point where I was coughing up blood. The body smells that were coming out of my body were very, very strong.
Interviewer: You were coughing blood during the course?

Zara: Towards the end. Not ... you know, but it was like a cough. And the body odours were very interesting coming out extremely strongly and it didn’t matter how many showers I had. Just very strong body odours. All that stopped on day 11, and never had any chest problems after that. All my chest problems have gone.

Interviewer: From the young age and before you went in you had chest problems?

Zara: Yes, I was always chesty getting colds and things like that. But all that dissipated. That chestiness went and I don’t know how you would explain all those very strong physical body odours coming out of my body. I was very self-conscious of them trying to take lots of showers but on day 10 that stopped as well. But it was just the complete, the complete mental ... I mean suddenly it just swung everything around in my life – totally, on a physical, mental level in every which way. It just totally, as I said ... it just felt like coming home.

Interviewer: And mentally when you came out, what was different from before you went in?

Zara: Ah, I felt so happy [raising her tone to exude happiness]! I felt so joyous. I felt the happiest I’d ever felt. Just overflowing with the feeling of loving-kindness toward all beings. And very peaceful within myself. Very equanimous, very calm. Yes, a just a total overwhelming difference.

Interviewer: And before were you very ordinary going in?

Zara: Ah, absolutely. When you grow up in New Zealand, you know, going through the drug phase, the hippie phase, all those different things. But all of that just dropped away.

Interviewer: Had you gone through those phases?

Zara: Yes! Everyone does. Many people do.

Interviewer: The hippie phase.

Zara: The hippie phase [laughs]. And then the tourist phase and what not. And I didn’t realise how much I was looking into until I did that first course and then I knew [laughs].

Interviewer: OK. So let me ask you - all these experiences in dharma and practices - what would you say would be the major impact in your life?
Zara: OK. I’m a lot more compassionate toward other people. I don’t have the need to drink or take drugs any more. That’s all dropped away. There’s a lot more joy in my life. The understanding of suffering at a deeper level and realising that we’re all on this planet together at this point in time. But of course none of us will be here in a hundred years. So you realise the human … it’s just the suffering inherent in the human condition. On the emotional level, it’s all the anger, the sadness, the grief, how our happiness is tied to what we have and don’t have. And on the physical level, that life is a progressive thing and it’s so impermanent. While there are quite a lot of good memories when people are young and getting married and even not all people have that, but then the disease inherent in this body and the decay inherent in this body. So there is much less clinging, I think, to this body and there is much less clinging to the things in my life. I’ve just learnt that when things happen that are unpleasant, they’re not permanent. And when things happen that are pleasant, then I still enjoy them but I know they’re not permanent. It’s just the nature of life. So it’s really translated at a natural level in my life.

Interviewer: Describe what happiness is to you now.

Zara: Happiness is a state of peace of mind. It’s peace of mind. It’s an inner joy. It’s an inner happiness that is not dependent on what I have or what I don’t have on the outside, in terms of family, everything.

Interviewer: OK. So with this in mind how would you deal with, say, difficult experiences in the past or fear, loneliness and things like that.

Zara: So difficult experiences in the past, you can’t change the past, it’s gone, can’t buy it back for a million dollars. So if they’re going to manifest themselves, they’re going to manifest themselves as a memory. You’re going to respond to that memory with either sadness or whatever. So once again it just comes back to the technique. Just experience it as a sensation because the more you react at the intellectual level, the stronger the hold that particular conditioning has on you. But if you just learn to not react to it, it’s intense but it doesn’t last forever and it passes. And the more you don’t react, the more and more it loses its intensity. So I guess they’re all states of mind - loneliness is a state of mind isn’t it?

Interviewer: Can you give an example of one of the bad experiences that you might want to talk about.

Zara: One of the experiences was recently. My husband was dragged through the papers because ... and I think he was there in the papers about 4 times. We had all of the Health Department against us. Things happened that were not ethical where they told him they were doing things when they weren’t doing them. And they put him before the medical tribunal and he’s actually gone on probation.

Interviewer: Is he a doctor?
Zara: He’s a doctor. It involved the death of a young girl. But the father was also a doctor. So we had all sorts of publicity. You couldn’t get bigger than that [laughs]. And at the same time my husband – he’s done 6 courses but he doesn’t meditate so he’s not ... you know, he reacts – and so he was in a state of quite deep depression for the 3 years that this went on. It was a very difficult time for us. It happened and I couldn’t stop it happening. But it happened, so what? The thing is you’re not generating hatred toward the people that are doing that to you because what goes around comes around. And at the same time you’re looking after your family and protecting your family and doing what you can do.

Interviewer: Did you feel anguish at the time?

Zara: Anguish did arise at that time. There were times when I felt anguish and then I sat down and observed it as sensation.

Interviewer: And what sensation is anguish?

Zara: Anguish, umm ... I suppose, well, see all sensations are based on earth, air, fire and water. OK. Fire is heat. Anything to do with ... from the coldest sensation to the hottest sensation. Earth is weight, heaviness ... from the lightest to the heaviest. Air is movement and water is cohesion. So you would say there was lots of air movement: agitation. A little bit of fear. Whatever that emotion is, it has its own sensation.

Interviewer: It would be earth, pretty heavy at times?

Zara: Yeah, at times. But it just manifests and you just observe it. There is nothing to do with it. It’s just arising and passing. And by not reacting to it ... you see what happens normally if people roll in their anxiety and roll in their aversion they become sick, they become mentally sick. That’s how people end up in that situation where they often need medication.

Interviewer: Does it go quickly for you that kind of strong feelings, the worse ones?

Zara: Yeah, yes it does. Yeah, absolutely! Well you see, it’s a practice, it’s a training and so the more you train the mind to be with sensations the less likely you are to indulge at rolling in negative emotions or negative thoughts.

Interviewer: Just ask: were you raised as a Christian?

Zara: Not a strict Christian. My parents were Presbyterians. I went to church until I was nine and I decided one day when I was sitting there listening to the minister that he was reading from a book. He didn’t believe a word he said and I was never going to go to church again.

Interviewer: So they weren’t strict conservative Catholic type?
Zara: No

Interviewer: Now what is your purpose in life?

Zara: Just to keep growing I guess. Because you see, you never ... the thing is unless the path is going to take you somewhere, why follow it? So we’re all working, I suppose, toward our own liberation and our own liberation is free from misery, free from suffering. And to do that the mind has to be transcendentally pure. So one of the qualities is not only developing the paranormal bit but for the mind to become transcendentally pure. So the more that you can purify your mind, the more progress you make on the path. And this is the only thing that I can do! It is to keep practicing to ... because you see what is the mind of an arahant? The mind of an arahant is one who has gone beyond. So in other words, the mind of an arahant does not generate anger, craving, aversion or ignorance. There’s no fuel there left to burn. It just sees things as it is. So it’s just fully aware and I think ... so that is what I practice: is to keep moving toward that, to learn not to react, not to generate negativity toward other beings and not to disturb the peace and harmony of other beings as much as possible. To try to develop the qualities of even a sotapanna, forget an arahant, even a sotapanna which is a stream-enterer. Goenka gives a wonderful example, if, for example you’re a Christian, and you believe very strongly in Jesus Christ and God, then what is God? God is nothing but love. But how do you best pay respect to a man of the calibre of Jesus. You develop those qualities in yourself. It’s not a matter of going down blindly and praying ‘Please give me this, please give me that’ and then running out into the day and breaking every rule of the book and leading an impure life, and a self-centred and selfish life. You have to develop those qualities – that’s what it’s about. That’s the greatest way to pay respect.

Interviewer: It sounds like you do set a goal but that goal ...

Zara: ... is not to react [laughs]!

Interviewer: It is. But I mean you do want to get rid of all suffering ...

Zara: But, you see, it’s a double-edge sword because you can’t crave that. It’s like the technique is a tool and you keep working with that tool. But it’s a long, long, long job and it might not even happen for who knows when! But at the same time you just are in the present moment and this is what I’m doing at the present moment.

Interviewer: Do you think that ultimate liberation which is enlightenment is the final goal?

Zara: I think so. I definitely think so. Because ... yeah, for anyone. It’s a process and I think as part of that process, I’m not just looking at that: it’s developing those qualities within that makes one a good human being. And those qualities happen to be the same qualities that need to be developed toward that state of
mind, I suppose, when one becomes *arahant*. So to develop love and compassion toward all beings. To be less self-centred and egotistical. That’s what it really is: a breaking down of, I suppose, the ego.

Interviewer: It looks like you’re more concentrated on actually the doing.

Zara: Yeah, yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Interviewer: Rather than the goal.

Zara: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. It’s like if you build a house, you’re not going to build a house out of thin air. You’ve got to build it. So you concentrate on doing and the house is the result of that doing.

Interviewer: Absolutely. What do the ideas of non-self (*anatta*), karma, rebirth mean to you?

Zara: *Anatta* is basically non-self – that which is not I. We always like to give ourselves a capital ‘I’ not just a little ‘i’ with a dot on top. So *anatta* is a state of non-self and there are times when one does achieve that in meditation. Usually when you meditate it’s the observer and the observed; ‘I’ observing my sensations. But when you get to the point of pure observation, there’s no observer and no observed. You could say, ‘Yes,’ that is the state of, at that particular moment, *anatta*. But, in the ultimate sense, it’s the state of mind of an *arahant* is representative of that state of *anatta*. When you talk about rebirth, it’s not the transmigration, I don’t feel, of a soul or of a ... mind. You see when you started this life as a little boy and your mother brought you up, you reacted in certain ways to different situations as they arose in your life. Now, according to how your life progresses and who you come into contact with and the kind of person you become, that’s the kind of mind that you will carry, that’s the kind of consciousness you will carry at that particular time in your life. When it comes to the last mind-moment in your life, when it comes to the death of this body and the separation of the mind-matter phenomenon, the next mind-moment will be nothing but a product of the last mind-moment. So I don’t think there’ll be any fairies coming down from heaven to take you up or I don’t think you’ll be able to say, “I want this body” [laughs]. Next life, if you’ve led a good life and a wholesome life, then the future is bound to be full of brightness because the mind is full of brightness. If you’ve led an unwholesome life full of darkness and harming others, how can you expect sugars from lemons? It’s the law of nature that the next mind-moment will be the child of the last mind-moment. So in that regard, yes, there is a progression of consciousness and that consciousness as it separates from the physical matter will find ... it will find another physical vehicle that suits that particular consciousness, that particular state of mind at that particular moment. And with regards to karma, there are tendencies in the mind and everyone has different tendencies. The only thing I can say about karma is that whatever happens in the present moment you have freedom of choice: there’s the right thing to do and there’s the wrong thing to do. So if you have events happening in your life as a result of past actions – now forget about past
lives – it might have been something that you did in this life that was a terrible things. Example: you murdered someone and you go to court and the court says you’re a murderer and you have to go to jail for life. That’s your karma as a result of that action but you have freedom of choice in the present moment as how you live that life.

Interviewer: I wonder do these concepts influence you in the way you think and in the way you act?

Zara: I think not the concepts. It’s more of the mental training because if you want to see a nice lovely cake, you’d want to eat it [laughs]. If you see something that is very desirable, sometimes it’s … But, you see, it’s what I think the technique does: it’s like a deconditioning process. So, you’re not going to hurt someone – you become incapable of hurting someone to get what you want. When you do something wrong intentionally you know immediately because your sensations are telling you that you’re harming that person, and that’s not a good thing to do.

Interviewer: So you’re more in touch …

Zara: Absolutely.

Interviewer: … so if you have to be harming somebody then do you feel that sensation more?

Zara: You cannot harm someone without first harming yourself! You cannot harm someone without first harming yourself. For example, if I’m so angry I’m going to do something or say something … it starts at the mental level: anger, anger, anger. If I’m really angry I’ll say something. If I’m really, really angry, physically I’m going to do something. It’s just a product; most actions are products.

Interviewer: Could you give me an example of, say, an action like that? Something in the past that you’ve done.

Zara: Yes, if I’ve been angry at my children, if I’ve yelled at them with the basis of anger, that’s a very simple one for any mother. In other words, I’ve not been aware of my sensations. I’ve lost my temper. I’ve lost control of my awareness and I’ve yelled. But you see, there’re two ways of yelling at a child. You yell with the basis of love to help them because you know that what they’re doing is wrong, and they won’t listen to anything else. Or b) you’re angry at that child and so you throw your anger on them. So these are two different … it’s like, Goenka gives another example, it’s the mental volition that matters most. It’s like he says the dacoit [member of a gang in India] with the robber hiding in the forest, comes upon a victim, wants the money but the victim won’t give it and so plunges the knife into the stomach. What’s the volition? Greed and killed that person. Then you have a surgeon in a hospital and he puts the knife into the stomach of a patient because this patient has some problem. As a result the patient dies but what was the mental volition? To help that person.
Interviewer: So for you when you get angry with your children what is it that you try and do?

Zara: If I lose my temper and I do get angry with my children and I do shout at them with anger, I’m very quick to realise that. I’m very, very quick to realise that and realise that I’ve made a mistake, and I’ll go to the child and say, “Look, I’m sorry I’ve yelled at you. I’m sorry I got angry. You know, but this is what I’m trying to tell you.” And so there are other times when they can just be absolutely naughty and I’m quite equanimous, patient. I can see that. But sometime if it’s persistent and they continue to do that and they don’t stop, then I say, “Maybe you need time in your room,” because yelling won’t work. Yelling only makes you feel horrible [laughs].

Interviewer: I’m just turning now to those ethical principles, the precepts that you mentioned. How do you interpret and apply those precepts?

Zara: I guard them with my life! Because to break one of those, you ... It’s not a right and a ritual; you see they’re there for a reason. And if you do start lying and if you do start cheating, stealing, lying, whatever, you can’t do an action like that without creating tremendous waves on the mind, tremendous amount of agitation or, you know, what you have to generate to break those precepts. So they are so important to me. They protect me.

Interviewer: And you’ve kept them for how many years?

Zara: Ah, well I didn’t start with the precepts when I first started; they weren’t very strong at all. Now they’ve been very strong for quite a number of years, definitely. But then again you can look at it like, with the precepts they get more subtle as well. It depends. On the very gross level you could be talking about them and then you could be talking about them on a more subtle level as well. Like you can say about not killing but then if you eat meat and things like that.

Interviewer: What does the first precept mean to you?

Zara: Not to take life. Not to kill. Not to deprive a being of its life because to get a life in this world whether you’re an insect or whatever it’s so precious anyway.

Interviewer: Are you a vegetarian?

Zara: No, I eat a little bit of fish and I a bit of chicken. And I’m aware that I do that and sometimes I look at it and I see what I’m doing and I look down at the carcass of the bird and some aversion arises, but I’ll eat a little bit.

Interviewer: Has this been a conscious effort to cut down on meat over the years?
Zara: No, no, because when I was 13 I decided, being a healthy New Zealand girl growing up on 3 meals of meat a day, that I’d had enough [laughs]! So I stopped when I was about 13. Yeah, I didn’t bother me.

Interviewer: I see. Some Buddhists are vegetarians. Some are semi-vegetarians.

Zara: A lot of it is cultural, I think. Because Sayagi [Goenka] used to say – he used to eat a bit of chicken – but he used to say, “What is the last mind-moment of that being before it dies? It’s filled with nothing but tremendous agitation and fear and that permeates the whole body of that being”.

Interviewer: What about the second precept, what does that mean to you?

Zara: Not to steal. Just not to take what is not given. That is very important.

Interviewer: OK, the third?

Zara: To be in a relationship with just one person. And to have relations within that relationship but not outside that relationship.

Interviewer: Did you say emotional?

Zara: Physical relationship.

Interviewer: So you interpret the three so far as more traditional Burmese interpretation?

Zara: Um, no. Stealing - everyone knows. It doesn't matter whether you're Burmese or whether you're a Christian. The Christians have the 10 commandments – it’s the same. Yeah, I guess I do interpret [them traditionally].

Interviewer: It’s a fairly traditional interpretation similar to where I’m from. But some Western Buddhists they would interpret them differently. Sometimes more loose in my view or wider like ...

Zara: If you’re single the guidelines are ... celibacy is ideal. In other words, you’re not using people for your own gratification. Because that’s what a lot of it is about: using people.

Interviewer: And not lying. That can be fairly subtle as well.

Zara: Absolutely, that can be fairly subtle as well. But it is very important to be very truthful, to tell the truth. I think that is always the best way.

Interviewer: So what was the last one?

Zara: Not to have intoxicants.
Interviewer: So you don’t take any kind of alcohol or drug?

Zara: No. No. No. Because you realise that, once you start meditating, the mind is naturally so pure. Drugs are so dulling on the mind. Intoxicants are so dulling on the mind. And also you don’t need them any more. Because why do you take drugs and intoxicants? To achieve a certain state of mind.

Interviewer: So you don’t drink even a drop of alcohol?

Zara: No. No. No.

Interviewer: OK.

Zara: It’s more of a householder, I guess, kind of sila because if you’re a monk, if you’ve renounced a householder’s life, then it’s a totally different kettle of fish. You know, those sila are so important and not that, I think there are over 250 something sila depending on, once again, the country, the culture and the sangha.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting. I compare it with the Tibetan tradition and they have the precepts as well. But some of the precepts they take it quite far and this is quite good actually. Very subtle. But I think you understand it yourself.

Zara: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: What’s your view on having children?

Zara: As householder?

Interviewer: Yes.

Zara: Fine. I haven’t relinquished the householder’s life. If I was ready to relinquish the householder’s life I’d become a nun. I’d step out of society but I still very much have cravings to be part of society. That’s very much part of my life. You know, children, husband, work, house, all that sort of stuff. So children are a big responsibility. Especially when you’re aware that you’ve given birth to this being and this being is only in this world for a short time, not a long time, you have a responsibility toward that child to try and support and help that child. Because you know they’re going to have to navigate their way through their own lives. And you know that, ultimately, that they’re going to have to face their own death as well. So it’s a big responsibility. Very big responsibility.

Interviewer: So you were practicing before you had children, right?

Zara: Yes.

Interviewer: So in your opinion is there anything wrong with having children?
Zara: Oh no! No! Because you see the thing is you're part of society. You're living in society and, once you separate yourself out and say, “I’m different”, people look at you differently. And they don’t see you as part of society. So as soon as you put a label on yourself you exclude so many people. It’s not about labels.

Interviewer: With regards to the precepts and the meditation and so on, because they go together ...

Zara: Hand in hand.

Interviewer: ... have they changed your social relations in terms of in your family throughout the years or with other people or people who you might not like. Have there been any changes throughout the years?

Zara: Yes. When I first started meditating my parents first thought, “What’s going on here?” And my older brother who is a very successful businessman and has helicopters and things like that, and he loves to go hunting and shooting, and he shoots deer and pigs and ducks – it if moves, shoot it [laughs]. And my mother and father grew up through the Depression and became successful business people. My two brothers inherited the family business and developed it. So they always saw me as a little bit ... head in the clouds, maybe. But over the years, and they’ve seen that constantness and that happiness, they might argue with each other but at the same time I’m very close to all of them. I love them all for who they are even if I think, “Why are you doing that?” I will not hate my brother because of that. You know, he’s my brother. So I think that maybe people that are only interested in drinking and things like that, and partying; all that has dropped away. But I have so many friends from so many different backgrounds in life: meditators, non-meditators, all sorts of people and I love them all! So I think I get a lot more out of my friendships now.

Interviewer: But you seem like you’ve been very social, friendly, nice sort of person throughout your life. Would that be true?

Zara: Ah, when I was younger my socialising was done more with alcohol and partying and things like that. That was before vipassana.

Interviewer: Because you seem a very happy person.

Zara: But you see I’d decided at a young age that if I couldn’t find what I wanted then I was going to burn out with drugs and alcohol. I was big time party girl. You know ... rah, rah, rah. But it was a very superficial thing. But when you’re young there is a general level of happiness there but it always has the potential as one gets older to turn into cynicism. You see, when you’re young you’re at the head of the parade – you are the parade, you are the party – but as you get older you realise that you’re sometimes on the sideline watching the parade. You’re no longer at the head of the parade. For everyone dealing with the ups and downs of life, getting yourself established, all of those things – they can have a very
dulling down effect on people. And they can make ... I don’t know a lot of older people who are incredibly happy with their lives, who don’t ...

Interviewer: But you seem to exude that joy now.

Zara: Because I am happy [laughs]! That’s what it’s all about. And, as I say, you have to get results from the technique. If you don’t get results from the technique ...

Interviewer: Because you could have ended up with those drugs the other way. Dead or something.

Zara: Oh, totally! Absolutely! Absolutely. But there was a part of me that wanted more out of life and I found that. It’s an art of living I suppose, for me. I found an art of living that is better than anything I know of, for me. I’m not saying anyone else but, for me, it gives tremendous benefits. And it’s not easy; it doesn’t fall into your lap. You have to work hard.

Interviewer: What about consumption? Has the practice made an impact on consumption, the way you consume?

Zara: Um ... I live a very Western life, so ... I don’t have as many needs as I used to have ... but then maybe that’s because I have everything I need anyway ... in terms of family and things like that anyway. But life is definitely simpler.

Interviewer: Lastly, with your livelihood at the moment and other than being a mum, what’s the idea behind this centre? Why are you doing this centre?

Zara: Um ...

Interviewer: It seems like your other baby.

Zara: No, no. I try and keep out of the way here [laughs]. You see the thing is Goenka Gi, this tradition I see as responsibility of anyone who Goenka Gi appoints as an assistant teacher or area teacher, whatever. Their responsibility is to maintain the purity of the technique – to protect it so that it can go on to the future generations. Because Sayagi [U Ba Kin] has gone now. And Goenka Gi is very old; he’s 80. And he’s vital because he had that direct connection with Sayagi. There are many assistant teachers now that are second and third generation. They haven’t even sat with Goenka Gi before. So that transmission of the technique and this centre really is nothing more than a vehicle for the transmission of the dharma so that people get benefits. And I see my job as to look after it in such a way to ensure that the 5 precepts are maintained here, and that people have the opportunity to come and sit courses. And to protect it, to make sure that no money things creep in, there’s no commercialisation, other practices or anything like that.
Interviewer: So as one of the founders of this centre what’s your vision or idea of what you want to achieve for this place?

Zara: I see it like a garden. I see it like a garden. The gardener gets in the garden with the hoe or the rake or whatever and tends the vegetable. This centre is nothing but a field of merits. Anyone who comes and serves here and sits here is not doing something for themselves; they’re doing something for others. Because when you’re serving you don’t get paid. No one receives any remuneration - not the teachers, assistant teachers, volunteers, no one. So it’s a nice chance to develop a little bit of anatta - you know, looking after others. The only vision I have for the centre is that it should be available/open to one and all and that people should be able to come here and enjoy the atmosphere and sit 10-day courses and get benefits. But it doesn’t stop here. There’s going to be many centres in the state. There’re already 5 centres in Australia. The flow of it ... the only reason the centre came to be here is because old students had done the technique in India or at Blacktown and said, “We want a place like that for people in our state.” So they’ve come and donated the money. And then everything that’s built here is built out of donations. And you can only give a donation if you’ve done a 10-day course. So no one else can give a donation. So everything you see here is a product of people that have come and done courses. And no one asks them for a donation either. So at the end of a course they may not feel like making a donation; it’s a good test of the technique. Because if they don’t get benefits they won’t make a donation.

Interviewer: And have you put personal finance into this place?

Zara: Small donations as I can afford because I have a household to run and things like that. But yes, a bit of time here and there. And it gives back more than I give to it. It gives to me more than I give to it, much more.

Interviewer: Thanks very much.

Part 2 (9 May 2005)

Zara: Most people who’ve come here come because they’ve had friends who’ve done courses and they’ve seen some changes. They come back and look different or they’re acting differently and they say, “Hey, what have you been doing?”

Interviewer: So have you observed many people like that?

Zara: Well, you see there’s maybe 60 people booked in for the next course. And it is all word of mouth. So one friend will tell another friend.

Interviewer: Have you seen any amazing transformations?

Zara: Well, I say, for a woman it’s like a free beauty treatment. Because, you know, you see people who come in and their faces are so heavy and lined and
the world on their shoulders. At the end of 10 days and you see them and a lot of the lines have gone and they’re glowing. You couldn’t get a better beauty treatment than that could you [laughs]? No, I’ve seen many people turn their lives. I remember in Perth one year we had a young man on the course and he came up to the seat and said, “I’m suppose to be in jail”. He said that he’d robbed a service station with a sawn-off shotgun. He said, “But the judge let me off. Because I’ve actually met somebody who’s done this technique and I want to develop the same qualities that that person’s got”, because he found those qualities very attractive. And so he said that the judge has given me a reprieve so I can come and do this 10-day course, and that’s why I’m here. And I remember another young girl in the late teens and she’s a heroine addict. And she came to the course, and I think she used heroine not long before the 10-day residential course, and I remembered we said to her, “Well, the only criteria is do you want to help yourself, because if you want to help yourself then we’ll support you all the way. If you don’t, you’re wasting your time and our time.” And she worked really hard and she got tremendous benefits. She went out after the course and started using again and came back to another course. It took her four courses to finally come out completely of any heroine addiction. She came and said to us, “For the first time in my life I no longer crave heroine.” And you see this is what you’re dealing with. When you’re dealing with any of these major issues like drug addiction, even anger or whatever, it’s not the object. It’s not the person that makes you angry or it’s not the cigarette that makes you addicted. It’s not the bottle of wine or the heroine. It’s your sensations. Because you become addicted to that particular type of sensation. And when that sensation becomes very unpleasant your condition is that you reach for the glass, you reach for the heroine or whatever, and then sensations become bearable again. And then again they become unpleasant because that’s the nature, you know.

Interviewer: So you don’t like the unpleasant one ...

Zara: Well you become addicted to that particular sensation. When you take the heroine you’re addicted to that sensation or inhale smoke.

Interviewer: And the craving creates a big sensation.

Zara: Yes.

Interviewer: So if you can stop it there ...

Zara: Yes, exactly, and the only way to do that is by observing it and not reacting to it. And it’s the same with anger. It’s not that person that makes you angry; it’s what’s in here, your own sensations. And some people will get so conditioned, overwhelmed and addicted to that sensation that they become very angry people in their lives. Happiness is addictive too [laughs].

Interviewer: That’s true. I think you’re addicted to it [laughs].
In a conversation a little later, she comments that she’s not yet a stream-enterer: “I will tell you now, I’m not. I’m not going to put myself on the pedestal. I’m still plodding along,” and laughs gregariously.

Field notes
9 May 2005
• I drove from Brisbane to Sunvale to meet Zara at the vipassana centre. She is an assistant teacher there and helps regularly with organising and teaching. A 10-day retreat had just completed on Sunday, and I was meeting her 9.30am on Monday. It was a very rainy day.
• Zara came out of the main doorway as I approached the building and smiled and we greeted warmly.
• What struck me at first and throughout was that Zara exuded joy and happiness. She walked around smiling, was warm and beautifully serene.
• We made some tea on the second floor where the food and dishes were. We talked about Sayagi U Ba Kin who was the lay teacher of Goenka in Burma. He received the teaching from a monk. She talked affectionately of both men even though she did not meet U Ba Kin, although practiced at his centre.
• She had a brief meeting with some organisers before doing the interview. She was in the room next door and I could hear them laughing and the meeting was very warm and relaxed.
• Again, I could not help noticing she walked around with so much sense of joy. Perhaps it is because they’d just come out of retreat or maybe she is just like this. I will never know but I could believe the latter. She was inspiring and she looked 40 when she was in fact 50.
• In the office where we had the interview, there were several pictures of Goenka.
Interviewer: What lead you to take up Buddhism?

Frank: Well, like all of these stories they're quite long stories. I first read a book as an undergraduate and that was maybe 30-35 years ago or more than that ... 37 or 38 years ago. And it was a book call *The Three Pillars of Zen* and it was on the shelf of one of one of my lecturers. He was a music lecturer but for some reason he had this book on the shelf; he hadn't read it. I'd heard this word 'Zen' and I was interested in the word. So I borrowed this book and read it. And it was like ... sometime people talk about coming home or finding your home or finding something that immediately resonated clearly. It was very inspiring. It was something, in a sense although I was very young, I was searching for. I was searching for some form of spiritual practice which was not dogmatic which was not about a whole system of beliefs that I had to adopt, but which was about self-exploration and about coming to understand the truths of Buddhism experientially. Maybe I didn’t understand it in those terms right back then but that’s the way I’ve come to understand my practice journey. And so I began to practice *zazen* or sitting meditation just privately myself ... there was no group in Burkeville [fictional city name]. There was no teacher. So I just started to follow the instructions in the book. And I did that on and off for some years. I then went abroad as a graduate student and in my university there I was able to take a course which was Seminar in Zen. And part of this course was theoretical and part of it was practical. So part of it required that at 8 o’clock every morning we turned up at the university chapel and we did 45 minutes of sitting meditation. And there was a teacher there: someone who knew at least something about it. It was not an authorised Zen teacher but was still an experienced person. And then I came back to Australia and taught in various places, came back to Burkeville, and wanted to have a group to support my own practice. So I put up notices all around Burkeville – this was in 1981. Put up notices around Burkeville; people started calling and we called the first meeting and we decided about 5 people we were going to start every week having a Zen sitting. And from there it developed and I started going down to Sydney to the Sydney Zen Centre in order to do *seshin* or to do retreats. These are 7-days meditation retreats and that was my first contact with Zen teachers. And my very first *seshin* in Sydney, 7-day *seshin*, was with a teacher called Susan McKinsey. And she became my teacher and she is still my teacher. That was 1982. And so really my formal practice and my formal kind of commitment to Zen Buddhism really began in 1982 and it continued since then. We set up this group in Burkeville called the Burkeville Zen Group and that existed for about 12 years. And then it splintered into a number of smaller groups. Each one with a different emphasis, a different sort of approach,
a different lineage, and each one with different teachers. The teachers were usually visiting teachers who we would bring from America or Sydney or from somewhere else maybe once, twice or three times a year to do retreat. At the moment, I have a group called the Still Zen Group or Still Zen Burkeville. We established it in about 1992. It was then called Tranquil Zen Group but we changed our name just a year ago. About a year and a half ago/18 months ago my teacher, Susan McKinsey, gave me what is called ‘dharma transmission’ which means that, at that point, I was able to teach independently of her. So I became an independent teacher. I had been teaching for about 6 years before that but under her close supervision. So I continued to teach within this group. So that’s the last 30 years.

Interviewer: When were you in America?

Frank: The middle of the 1970’s I studied there from 1974 until 1976.

Interviewer: What does your practice involve now?

Frank: Practice is multifaceted. It involves many things. On an outward level, it involves sitting practice, sitting meditation. Our group meets just once a week for 2 hours sitting meditation period. During that I also sometime give talks. I also give private interviews to students. So within Zen tradition there is a tradition that students will come into the teacher for a short private interview regularly. And this is the way a lot of the teaching goes on. So partly my practice is sitting practice with the group and daily sitting practice. But partly my practice is also my teaching. And this is an important point because practice clearly doesn’t stop when one becomes a teacher. One’s ability to teach is only as good as one’s practice. So practice must continue quite strongly. And teaching itself becomes a practice. So when I do interviews and students come into me, my practice is the practice of listening. My practice is the practice of giving a student complete attention and then trying to respond appropriately to that student and to the difficulty that they might be having or to the question that they might be posing. But that is only as effective as the quality of one’s practice. So practice is partly formal meditation, practice of teaching. It’s also, what I call, practice in daily life and that simply has to do with the things that all religions talk about which is the way that we behave toward others, the kinds of behaviour we have, the way in which we monitor our behaviour, what we learn from monitoring our behaviour, monitoring our speech, monitoring our thought.

Interviewer: So your formal practice is sitting. Do you do that everyday?

Frank: Pretty much everyday I try to. There are times in everyone’s life where it just isn’t possible to sit on a particular day. However, if I can’t sit formally then what I will try to do is take some time out during the day to sit informally. So sometime I will just lock that door [office door] and I will not answer telephone calls and I’ll simply be in my chair here ... I will sit upright and I'll spend even if it's 15 minutes during the day ... ah ... just to touch base – that’s very important. Also sometime if I’m in a very busy time – it’s not even possible to take an hour out –
then sometime what I’ll do is just for 5 minutes ... maybe 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 times a day, just take 5 minutes and just give myself 5 minutes to come back to this moment.

Interviewer: Is that effective for you?

Frank: It’s not the same as doing a concentrated period of meditation but, yes, it is effective because what practice is always about is reminding oneself to come back to just what the present moment is, to just what is occurring right now, to what one is thinking, to what one is feeling, to what reaction one is having. So if you can do that for 5 minutes then that’s 5 minutes of practice. If you do it for an hour then that’s an hour of practice. We do what we can do – that’s what’s important. We shouldn’t have an ideal about practice, that practice has to be a certain way. Ideals in practice are dangerous because they just become another burden and inevitably human beings fail. Right? Because we never live up to perfect ideals. But if we see practice as something that we make consistent effort, but that effort might vary in different way. In different ways at different times, it expresses itself differently. But we have to be honest and we have to be sure that we’re not just avoiding.

Interviewer: Frank I think you said a little bit earlier that part of practice is being aware – I’m putting words into your mouths but I think that is what it’s all about – being aware, being present of the moment throughout the day. Can you describe a little bit of that in your experience?

Frank: Well, it can be describe in so many ways. You see, as I sit here with you as a human being I have all sorts of thoughts going on in my head. I have all sorts of feelings in my body. Maybe I have some thoughts of what I have to do this afternoon. Maybe I have some thoughts of having rushed in this morning and feeling in the body a little bit agitated. Maybe I have some thoughts or feelings about what I need to try and give you something useful. What is useful? So these are thoughts and I need to be aware of the thoughts that are arising throughout any experience. Because our thoughts are what we often act on. OK? But associated with my thoughts are experiences, feelings, sensations, reactions in the body. And so within the practice that we do, in our sitting meditation we spend a lot of time sitting quietly observing thoughts but also giving our attention to bodily sensations, and to the way in which many thoughts are accompanied by particular body or states of body. Now that is what we do in part when we sit. And that is something we can learn to do through our life and through our day. And the more that we can do that then it simply means we are more present in our daily experience. We’re actually practicing through that the paramita of conduct, the paramitta of right conduct ... because we are monitoring, watching, observing, experiencing and not acting blindly but trying to act with full awareness. So ya, if I ... suppose I’m in a meeting and it might be a difficult meeting and we start ... one notices the feeling arising, a feeling of tension, a feeling of perhaps of irritation, a feeling of anger. The important thing is to really notice that as soon as possible. In other words, not to allow it just to build and build and build and to indulge in it, but to immediately notice the arising of that reaction, to notice the arising of the thought associated with that reaction ... like,
'What that person said is stupid,' 'What that person said is unacceptable,' 'What that person said is ...' or 'That person doesn’t respect me.’ Now that is an interesting one. ‘That person doesn’t respect me, you know ... Hhr! [sounding of a shock]’

Interviewer: That you notice that thought?

Frank: You need to notice these thoughts. You need to notice that you have these thoughts because sometime you can have the thought and actually be caught up in the thought that it rules the situation. But I think all Buddhist practice fundamentally is about becoming aware of what the truth of this moment is. And this moment is not some ... doesn’t have to be understood as some cosmic moment. It needs to be understood as a moment of thought and feeling - thought, feeling and reaction. That’s the truth of the human moment.

Interviewer: Let’s say that thought came up, that angry thought or agitation thought you gave me an example of. Do you notice that thought or the sensation accompanying it?

Frank: Both. Both. It’s important to do both. Sometime, and it will differ from situation to situation, you will first notice the thought and we do a practice - it’s a very beginner’s practice but it’s a practice that needs to be sustained right through one’s practice life - a practice of labelling thoughts. ‘Having the thought that that person is stupid. I’m having the thought.’ In other words, to actually distance yourself sufficiently from the thought so you can say, ‘I am having that thought.’

Interviewer: And do you say it in your mind?

Frank: You might say it in your mind or you might be able to immediately see the thought. Sometime it helps to label it; it makes it very explicit. OK so sometime it’s the thought that you immediately observe. Sometime it’s the ‘Hhr!’ in the body that you first observe: OK it might be a strong feeling in the body; it might be a subtle feeling in the body; it might be a slight tension; it might be a slight feeling of anxiety; it might be a sensation that has no description – it can be an abstract sensation but it’s there; it might be feeling warm, hot ... feeling cold, feeling an emptiness, feeling ... could be anything, but it’s a sensation. And when there is such a sensation we should pay attention to it. We should direct attention to it as much as we can. Now, in meditation, one can do that. One can sit with a particular feeling ... quite strongly and for a period of time. When you’re in a social situation, a meeting or you know ... it’s not so easy to do but you can keep checking back with your awareness. It’s like shining a torch, shining it back on that feeling. So every few moments just ‘Hhh!’ acknowledging that feeling, acknowledging that it’s there, acknowledging that thought, just noting it. And then just moving on with whatever is going on. But if you do that then the likelihood that in some way you react inappropriately is lessened. It’s not ruled out but it’s lessened.
Interviewer: In theory, does being able to see that thought, because you are unattached to that thought, does that thought go away?

Frank: Not necessarily. The important thing is not to make the thought go away; the important thing is to see that you have the thought. That's the first thing. The thought will do what the thought does. Right? Thoughts come and go. The mind secretes thoughts all the time. Now it might be true that over time ... in practice ... the likelihood of having strong negative thoughts will lessen. But we are never free of them. The purpose when we do a practice like this is not to make the thought go away. The purpose is to see what the nature of that ill will is, what the nature of my feeling toward that person is, and to understand that this is something that I possess, this is something I do, this is something I experience. And even if it goes away, which sometime it can do, it doesn't mean I'm rid of that. In another situation it can come back. So the important thing is not to try and get rid of it; the important thing is to watch it and to avoid acting on it. Right? The thoughts themselves are neutral. The thoughts have no reality, right? What has reality is the way I act from them and the way I believe those thoughts. If I believe those thoughts are real, 'That person is stupid,' ... if I believe that and I act on it then I do harmful actions. And if I just see the thought and if I see, 'Uh huh,' having that thought, having that sensation, but I'm not going to act on it. Right? Distancing myself sufficiently from it so that I don't act from it, then that thought has no power.

Interviewer: Let me express another opinion by another Buddhist of a different tradition. He told me that he believes that Zen, while being very pure and effective, he does not believe that Zen after practicing it himself for many years – I think he practiced Ch'an which is the forerunner – that for the Western psyche, the Western mind it is not suited to the Western mind because of the Western conditioning often associated with Christian traditions of guilt, of emotional repression, those sorts of things that firstly need to be got rid of and that it's very difficult for them to experience sensations or feelings fully in what you're suppose to do in Zen, and that this really gets in the way and can be harmful. Do you have an opinion on that?

Frank: That's a very complex question. The first thing I would say about that is that we use a term like Zen as an all-encompassing term. But when we look at the history of Zen we actually find that there are many traditions within Zen. One of the things I'm very interested in is ... I'm a historian I suppose by ... I enjoy history. I do a lot of study and reading of history. And one of things that interest me is, when Zen began its development in China it was introduced into China in probably about the fourth/fifth century, we don't know exactly ... probably about the fifth century when Bodhidharma came to China. If you look at the kind of teaching, the kind of Buddhist teaching, that was followed by some of the early Zen masters, the early Zen traditions, it had elements of Theravadan practice, it had elements of Chinese practice, it had ... it was a mixture of many things. And then later Zen was refined into essentially two different strands. One was the Rinzai strand or the Linchi strand, and the other was the Soto strand, using the Japanese terminology. Each of which has a different feeling, a different emphasis
and within those there are many variations. But certainly in early Zen and some of the Zen traditions there has always been a very strong emphasis on practice with the conditions of daily life and with conduct. Now there are some varieties of Zen that try to cut through that completely. There are some varieties of Zen in which the aim is to cultivate a special kind of meditative state which allows one suddenly to experience what in Mahayana Buddhism is called *suunyata* or emptiness, and that the experience of that is in some way fundamentally transformative.

**Interviewer:** Is that the Sudden School?

**Frank:** Well all forms of Zen have an element of sudden, but yes. These days it’s more the tradition of Rinzai Zen or Linchi Zen. Now there are other approaches to Zen and, yes there is what used to be called historically the Gradual School which is about cultivation, gradual cultivation, progressive cultivation. And I think in the development of Zen that gradual cultivation or progressive cultivation has been devalued. The tradition in which I work and in which I’ve been trained is one which has a very strong emphasis on progressive or gradual cultivation. It doesn’t rule out the possibility that someone can have a sudden and unexpected and remarkable experience of emptiness, but that’s not its point. It is much more interested in building a foundation. My teacher says this: she says that you can take a new student and by various methods, particularly by various very concentrative types of practice, you can push that student to have some kind of experience, some kind of deep experience of very deep *samadhi*, very deep awareness of *suunyata*. But she says the problem with doing that is that that person has no foundation in their life which can sustain or carry that. So first you build the foundation – that’s the foundation of the daily work of observing oneself, of working with one’s reaction, of knowing oneself very, very clearly, very well and working to perhaps defuse the strength of one’s reactions. And over time one builds a foundation, a strong foundation and *then* it’s possible to maybe sustain, to hold, to have some basis on which some kind of deeper experience can be understood, can be integrated into one’s life. So I think there are two approaches in Zen: one says you’ve got to have really powerful experience and then you cultivate your life after that, and the other approach is you’ve got to cultivate your life and maybe at some stage you might have some sort of deep experience but the experience is not the point, that cultivation is the point. So I think the person you were talking to was probably talking – I’m not sure – about the first of those, not the second of them. My feeling about people in Western society is that fundamentally it doesn’t matter if people are in Western society or in Asian society or in African or Indian or whatever; people are fundamentally the same. There are cultural differences and practice always has to take into account those cultural differences. The way I teach my students might not work as well with a Japanese student or with a Chinese student. I don’t know but maybe not. So you take into account cultural differences but *fundamentally* human beings are the same. The Buddha said that. He said you know ... he didn’t say, ‘Well, you’re quite different from you: this kind of practice.’ Well, he didn’t divide human beings that way. He said that human beings experience themselves and their lives in this way. So I don’t believe that there are fundamental differences
between cultures in term of practice. I think there are superficial differences. I think Westerners do need to have things explained a little more than, say, traditional Japanese students or Chinese students. I think Westerners are more psychologically oriented and some of the language of Western Zen borrows from psychology and psychotherapy in the same way that Chinese Buddhism borrowed from Daoism. I mean you go into a new culture and you say, ‘Well, I’ve got to translate these ideas into this culture. What can I use? What existing ideas can I use to do that?’ And I think we do that in the West as well.

Interviewer: Now, your background as a child growing up and then reading the book for the first time - when was that, 20 years ago?

Frank: Oh more than that, more than 30 years ago.

Interviewer: And you were in your twenties?

Frank: Ah, it would have been early twenties.

Interviewer: Is your background Christian?

Frank: Yes. Well it was Christian but not strongly Christian. I mean I was brought up in a non-observant Christian household. So my parents would go to Church at Easter and at Christmas. They might go once or twice during the year. They would send their children to Sunday school. So I grew up learning about Christianity. As a teenager I was quite ... um ... interested in religion and Christianity. I read a lot but also I went to a Christian school. I went to a Lutheran school. And everyday we would have a church service and we would have classes in scripture. So I learnt a lot about traditional Christianity. And there was ... I remember one year, which was in my year 11, I actually ... I think in my year 11 I was truly a Christian in the sense that I believed. I believed implicitly. And I was ... it was very joyful. I really ... you know people talk about the experience of being born again – I kind of know what they mean by that because I sort of had that experience as a teenager. It only lasted about a year because I was very enquiring and very critical in a way, and there are too many inconsistencies in Christian doctrine and in Christian morality that just wouldn’t satisfy me. But yes I think I had a tendency towards religion.

Interviewer: And, in terms of your childhood growing up to the early twenties, how was that period emotionally?

Frank: I had a very secure family, a very loving family. But I was a very insecure child. I was not a well child. I had many quite serious illnesses as a child. And one illness lasted for a year and at one point it was life threatening. So yes from early childhood I think I had an experience ... I had some experience of insecurity but not from my family but from the conditions of life.
Interviewer: Now, since you’ve been practicing these numbers of years, have you had any profound experiences which have impacted the way you view yourself or view the world?

Frank: It’s a very difficult question because it depends what you mean by profound experience. You see, as I understand practice, something very, very simple can be very, very profound. There have been moments in my practice when ... well, there was a moment, I’ll tell you one moment in my practice and it will to someone it might not sound like anything very much ... but in a way it was moment that turned me around. When my teacher first came to Burkeville in 1983, we brought her from the United States out here for a month to do a seshin, a retreat. And we were very inexperienced; I had only met her the year before and started studying with her. We had set up a very complex retreat. You know, a Zen retreat runs like clockwork. It is very precise. Moment by moment everything happens precisely. There’s quite a lot of ritual. Right? There is ... it’s very formal. Right? And it has to be run, it has to be organised in such a way that it’s like clockwork so that there’s almost no talking, almost no verbal instruction. People have to know what they do. There has to be a very strong structure, foundation around a retreat. So it was very hard for us in those early days; we were very inexperienced. And we worked for months to make this retreat ... to get this retreat ready. And I can remember we had set up the zendo or the meditation room ... we went away to a retreat centre ... we had set up this room in a certain way. We had 50 people for this retreat. And we had set it up in a certain way – it was not an ideal room. And I had been responsible for this and I had put great effort into working out the best way to do this. I was very attached to this. I had done a really good job. And my teacher arrived at the centre and she came into the zendo and she looked around and she said, ‘OK, we won't do it like this. We’ll take these people here and we’ll put them over there. And we’ll put those people over there. I want a row of cushion down there ... da, da, da, da …’ And for me this was devastating. I mean I’d spent months ... I was so attached to my work here. And I kept saying, ‘But ... but can't you see that if ... it works better if it’s like this.' And she just looked at me and said, ‘Frank, things don’t always have to be perfect. Things don’t always have to be perfect.’ That’s all she said. And it went through me like an arrow because I had never before seen clearly how attached I was to an idea of perfection, to the idea that I could control things to create perfection. I was incredibly perfectionistic and incredibly attached to the product of my perfectionism. That one statement, ‘Frank, things don’t have to be perfect’ turned my practice around because suddenly I realised that what practice was partly about for me was my attachment to control and to perfection. Now, if we live our life from the idea that we have to be able to control things, we have to be in control, or if we live our life from the idea that I’m only worthwhile … I’m only worthwhile if I can achieve perfection then we’re going to live a very unhappy life. We’re going to live a life that also creates difficulties for others. And so at that time, and that was 25 years ago, I began one strand of my practice which was to work with that very deeply held view of myself and that very intense attachment to that view. So I would say for me that was a very profound moment. To
somebody who was standing there it looked like nothing. OK? But that is what practice is. See practice is very personal. Yes.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting. Are there any other kinds of different experiences?

Frank: Well there are, I think there are many experiences like that but that's the one that comes immediately to mind. I mean I think practice always, if one practices over 10, 20, 30, 40 years, ... that practice is just a fabric of moments like that ... just a fabric of moments where suddenly you see what you're doing. Alright? You see who you are. You see an attachment that you haven’t seen before. You see a pattern of behaviour and suddenly, by seeing it, it becomes real to you and it becomes something that can be practiced with. And these don’t have to be profound moments and yet they are moments of true insight. Because without those moments of true insight practice cannot advance. Now one can also talk about maybe moments of what I call 'experience' where, in a sense, the experience of the present moment drops away. But these are experiences that really cannot be described. But all practitioners have these experiences. In some traditions they talk about entering certain ... in Theravada Buddhism, entering certain jana or entering certain states of samadhi or absorption. Oh, these things are part of practice. Not that important but they happen.

Interviewer: But do you believe that they’re not to be taken too seriously?

Frank: Well, one accepts them. One experiences them. One learns from them. One respects them. But we don’t set those up as the purpose of practice, as the goal of practice. If you set something like that up as the goal of practice you set yourself up to fail. You know? There’re an awful lot of people who begin Buddhist practice and drop out because they’re not having the sorts of experiences that the book describes. OK? So what is the point of that? What is the point of creating a situation where people – many people – will fail because they won't live up to an ideal. What’s much more important is to work with what we have and to work with the reality of our life. And out of working with the reality of our life there is the possibility of experiencing some of these states of being. But it becomes a very natural process – not something like being struck by lightning. It’s just awakening from a dream. It just ... just there. It doesn't have to be anything very special.

Interviewer: And what is that purpose in your practice of Zen, the goal of practice?

Frank: Well I think the reason why all people practice fundamentally ... we all have agendas in practice ... and we all bring agendas and I think our agendas change in time. I think when I first started to practice Zen I wanted to be enlightened. I had no idea what that meant but I certainly sounded like a lot of ... sounded wonderful ... and I wanted it. But that is a very goal-oriented practice. I would say now the purpose of my practice ... there’s an old Chinese master who was asked this question and he replied, ‘The purpose of Zen or the purpose of
practice is to learn to be less harsh with oneself and to learn to be less harsh with others.’ In other words, to live more happily oneself and to try and create more happiness for others. Now, it seems to me that all true religion whether it’s Buddhism, Christianity, whatever ... has that as its core. And I think that that fundamentally is the purpose of practice. Most people don’t want to hear that because it sounds too ordinary.

Interviewer: But for you now?

Frank: For me now.

Interviewer: Would that be a reasonable goal?

Frank: Absolutely. I mean I want to be happy but I know that for me to be happy I have to create that as much as possible for others as well. My happiness is absolutely tied to the happiness of others. You see there is no separation. Ah I think that in practice we come to see that our limited aspiration for ourselves, ‘I want A. I want B. I want C,’ these are limited. That in fact fundamentally what we learn through practice is that all practice is about dana, about giving. That is at the core, the root of all practice. It’s not personal achievement or anything. It's about coming to understand that you practice for ... for everyone. Practice, I mean ... you know ... a single act of practice, a single act of awareness, a single act of presence resonates. We can't know what that resonance is but it's like ripples that go out.

Interviewer: For me, excuse my limited knowledge of Zen, that sounds like the idea of interconnected, interdependence and that emptiness in the positive meaning of interconnectedness.

Frank: Absolutely. I mean once again human definitions are inadequate but we can define emptiness, I suppose, in intellectual terms – it's very limited – not as the absence of anything but as the complete interdependence of everything. The complete interdependence of everything. So if we really recognise that and if we really experience that through our practice in some way then that will transform our view of life. I mean it has to. Because we begin with a view of ourselves as separate, but we through practice can come to a view of ourselves as dependent and interdependent.

Interviewer: OK, let me put you on the spot there: that is theory.

Frank: It is theory.

Interviewer: Now, in your personal life can you give me examples of how that would work?

Frank: Well, yes but once again it’s very ordinary. OK?

Interviewer: Great.
Frank: I talked a little bit earlier about perfectionism and control. You know, part of my personality and my makeup, part of my condition is to be a very controlling person. OK? For much of my life I believed that if I could simply organise things better I could keep better control of them, that therefore I could be less threatened, and things would work better and I’d be happier. OK? Now, that is a very crude statement but someone who is attached to or invested in perfectionism or in control has this view that what life is about is arranging things externally so that I’m happier ... so that they reinforce my identity, my well-being, my feeling of being valued. Now, you can run a dharma group or a Zen group like that because dharma groups are often quite hierarchical, and Zen groups are very often hierarchical. And as the teacher of my group I have complete authority over how practice is done. So you can run that from a very controlling, perfectionistic point of view. What I’ve learnt through practice and through experience is that that doesn't work. It doesn't work. And one of my favourite sayings is a saying by Suzuki-roshi, Shunryu Suzuki, who wrote a very wonderful book called *Zen Mind; Beginner’s Mind*. And one of the things he said was if you want to control – he was talking about a cow – he says, ‘If you want to control a cow give it a very big pasture.’ ‘If you want to control a cow give it a very big pasture.’ Now you might think if you want to control a cow what you’ve got to do is confine it, right? Confine it. He said, ‘Give it a very big pasture.’ Allow it to be a cow, to do what cows do. They wander. They graze. They meander. You know, they come and they go. That’s what true control is. That’s what true relationship is. So, with a Zen group, what does it mean then. Well, it means that sometimes you might say, ‘They’re not doing this quite right. Why do they keep doing that? They keep getting that wrong. It’s a simple procedure. Why aren’t they ...?’ Alright? I want to control that. What can I do to control that? OK? Or you can simply observe. You can simply observe and observe your own reactions. You can simply say, ‘OK I’m just going to watch how this operates for these people, how they engage with that aspect of their practice. I’m going to watch my reactions to that, the fact that I’d like it to be a different way. I’m going to practice with that for a little while and then coming out of that I’m going to decide how best to handle the situation.’ First of all is it important? Or is it not important? If it’s important to practice ... that people be aware of doing something in a particular way or be aware of the attitude they bring to something, then how can I best reintroduce that into practice. Is it that I need to give a talk about practice from that point of view? Is it that I need to demonstrate that in my own practice? In other words, not say anything but just rigorously demonstrate in the way that I do something. See it might be something as simple as when they come into the zendo, the meditation room, how do they put down their cushions. Now you might think, ‘What’s that about?’ Well, if someone comes into the zendo, they go over to their sitting place, they drop their cushion. What’s happening there? There is no connection between them and the cushion. There is no understanding that that is an act of awareness, to place the cushion. So very subtle things – how do you handle those things? I could say, ‘Don’t do that! Place the cushion properly!’ OK? And sometime that might be appropriate but usually not. Usually not with Westerners, maybe with Japanese. But not with Westerners. So you have to step back, experience your reaction to that which
are sometime reactions of disappointment because you’re seeing somebody who
doesn’t quite understand what practice is at that moment. You’re also seeing at
that moment an act of suffering because when awareness is not present we
suffer. So, give them a big expanse. Step back. Take time. Don’t try to control
everything. Some things will never be controlled. Sometime it’s giving people
time just to learn from their own experience – that’s important.

Interviewer: That’s very interesting. Now, has Zen changed your life?

Frank: I’ve just told you it has [laughs].

Interviewer: I didn’t expect anything else [laughs]. OK, with that example, those
are very interesting, have you used that, say, letting go of control or being aware
of your controlling tendencies ... have you used that technique of letting go in
your other parts of life?

Frank: Yes. I think so ... ah ... in one’s work, a very important part of one’s life.
Um ... [thinking hard] ... Yep. For a number of years I was in a management
position here at the University, and I was deputy director of the University, and I
was in charge of the academic program. So this was a very big responsibility.
And I had a very demanding boss. So his demands and expectations were very
useful for me because they really touch those difficult places for me which were
about getting things right, being perfect. So I had a lot to practice with there.
Right? But I also remember ... I mean one learns very much from these situations
... but one thing I’ll tell you about that I remember learning. I remember being at a
meeting once. There was quite a big meeting. There were maybe 10 or 15
people and we’re sitting round a table and the issue ... I can’t remember what it
was but it was quite a difficult issue ... and I could feel the way that I was
becoming ‘Hhh!’. And I realised that I was coming out of meetings like that feeling
often that I had failed. Why? Because it was as if I needed – how can I express
this? – I was taking on myself all the responsibility for the decisions that were
being made. Sometime a decision was made by a large committee and I could
see that it was not the right decision or it would not work properly or it could not
be carried through or it would create difficulties. And I would kind of take all of
that on my own shoulders as if I myself had failed. And I realised that I was trying
to take on responsibility for everything. And I started to realise as I practiced with
it that we can’t do that. It’s destructive and it’s impossible. That it’s just an
expression, another expression of the desire to control everything. So in my work
life I think one of the things that I’ve learnt again is just to sometime allow things
to take their course. To allow things to take their course. To allow things to take
their course. If there’s something skilful that you can do to direct it in a positive
way, do it. Often there isn’t. Often you have no control. You might have some
influence but you have no control. And you simply allow things to unfold. When
you can intervene, you intervene and you do what you can do. But there’s no
point trying to feel like you are the institution which is what I did for a time. But I
learnt quickly.

Interviewer: Has that made your work life better?
Frank: Yes, it was still difficult. It was a struggle because those positions are very difficult and very stressful and very busy. But that’s just one thing that I learnt from it. There are many things that I learnt from having to do that.

**Part 2 (20 May 2005)**

Interviewer: What is happiness to you?

Frank: [laughs] Do you know ... I’ll tell you what immediately came into my mind when you said that is ‘I don’t know.’ I think there is a conventional meaning of happiness and there is another meaning of happiness. Conventional happiness means, ‘Things are going my way. Things are going well. And physically well. The conditions of my life are adequate. Have no major problems.’ That’s the conventional understanding of happiness is. But I think that through practice ... well as human beings we always have that. We always have that. You know, we never ... we are attached to our comfort and we like it when things are comfortable and good. That’s just the truth. But through practice we do start to come to see that there is another form of happiness that I wouldn’t even use the term ‘happiness’ for. I think I would use the term ‘joy’ and I don’t mean by joy that everything is kind of rosy or that I’m in some kind of incredibly happy state all the time. But the way I understand joy or that kind of complete happiness is being comfortable with the way things are. Being comfortable with the way things are. Now when things are going really well that’s easy. When things are going not so well that’s very hard. And that’s where true practice cuts in. If I become ill and I have to deal with illness or if someone close to me becomes ill and I have to deal with ... of if I experience the death of somebody or if I experience someone suffering in old age or if ... anything could happen.

Interviewer: Have you experience that?

Frank: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer: The joy there? Even in ...

Frank: No ... ah, you see the point ... this is why I’m reluctant almost to use the word ‘joy’ here because sometime these situations are intense struggles, intense practice struggle to remain ... to practice with those situations can be very, very hard. But I think that what one learns over time is that adversity or difficulty is not by definition a negative. What one starts to see is that it is also an opportunity for very strong practice ... because you have to. You have to. If you become very ill you have to practice with that. You have no choice. You face life and death. You face mortality. You face lack of control. You experience everything that you don’t want. It’s a tremendous opportunity for practice. And, in a way, you’re pushed into practice. You have to engage with those experiences. Now, if through practice we’ve learnt some of the skills that enable us to do that better than we otherwise would ... I think that out of that comes a kind of satisfaction, a kind of ... an appreciation of the rightness of things. It’s not happiness. It’s not joy in a
conventional sense but it’s ... confidence ... yep, I don’t, can’t express it. But it’s a very difficult thing to talk about.

Interviewer: Solid.

Frank: Some solidity, some foundation that is always there. There is a foundation there and even in the most difficult circumstance that foundation will be there. It doesn’t mean that it transforms everything immediately into ... it doesn’t mean it makes everything easy. Alright? Why should we expect life to be easy? I mean, it isn’t. We should expect to experience difficulties. Within some Zen ... some Zen teachers say explicitly that it’s a gift to be presented with difficulties. Mostly we don’t want to know about this gift [laughs].

Interviewer: Are you joyful or happy, for lack of better words, when you are in sitting meditation?

Frank: I don’t ... I don’t know because I don’t think that's the point, in a way. Um ... the point is just to sit.

Interviewer: But do you enjoy them?

Frank: It’s ... yes ... well, you see, I don’t want to answer that question ... because I think ... I don’t want to set up the idea that we practice for enjoyment. I think there is enjoyment in practice. I think there is great joy in practice but that’s not why we practice.

Interviewer: I’m guessing that people who have experienced joy in meditation ... there is a comparison between other forms of joy. So you have a basket of options.

Frank: It’s different though. It’s a ... you can compare it but the joy that comes through practice is of a different quality because it is the joy that arises from our true aspiration, our true realisation of ourselves, of who we are fundamentally. That’s a kind of joy that has no ... it’s different in quality from being happy. I mean it can be present in normal happiness but most people’s ... mostly when we’re happy it’s just we’re getting what we want. And that’s not it.

Interviewer: And when you say there are difficult situations like deaths, illnesses and so on, is the practice the same to cope with these?

Frank: Always, it’s exactly the same. You know, I went through in recent years the death of an elderly relative and she was someone who I was quite close to and she had no other relatives. And she was fine, she was quite well until her late eighties and then she started to decline. She went into an old person’s home, a ... not a nursing home but a one level down from that. And during the last year she declined greatly and eventually became very ill and died. Now, for about three years I saw her every weekend and I would go on Saturday and we would ... I would ... we would go out together. And she loved driving. She couldn’t
walk much but she loved getting in the car and we would drive for three hours and we explored everywhere in Northern Maryland. And sometime I would go there to pick her up and I would just sit in the car outside and I would experience what I was thinking and feeling. And sometimes what I was thinking and feeling was: ‘I don’t really want to do this. I know that it gives her pleasure but I don’t want to do this. I just don’t want to do this.’ Now, that’s human. Sometimes even what we know is a good thing to do we don’t want to do it. Doesn’t serve me. I’d much prefer to go off and spend the afternoon having coffee with my friends or whatever. Right? OK but to experience that and acknowledge it before I got out of the car and walked into her home is very important ... was very important. If you don’t acknowledge that, that you have that resistance then in some way the relationship is coloured by that. So you must experience that and you must acknowledge it. You must know that you have those feelings and thoughts. Know that you have those reactions in the body. And having experienced it, then just get on with it. Just do what you need to do! And keep checking back in. Because once you do it you actually find that, well, ‘I really like her, I enjoy this, we have fun together’ ... you know. And yet always for human beings we hold back. It doesn’t always suit us. So it’s important to acknowledge things like that and to work with them. So in a case like that and likewise as she approached her death there were all sorts of feelings, strong emotions and so on which you have to acknowledge, you have to experience, you have to be present with it. All sorts of doubts ... you know, ‘What should I do in this situation? Should we do this medical intervention or should we not do medical intervention? What should I do? I have a decision to make.’ These things can be difficult. You need to experience what’s beneath those: the tension, the fear, the anxiety. All of those things have to be experienced.

Interviewer: Frank, what do you see as your purpose in life?

Frank: [Loud laughter] Here I am [laughs]. I can have no other purpose than just to be here. There is no point trying to explain a purpose. There is one mystery that is inexplicable and that is why I’m here, why you’re here, why we’re here. There’s no explanation for that. There is no explanation for that! That is an ultimate mystery. We can explain it in all sorts of way: we can talk about karma and about this and about that and about that – it explains nothing! We’re here. That’s the reality. So the purpose of living is to live that reality. We have no choice. The question though is: how skilfully do we live that reality? With what degree of skill? We can live it unconsciously. We can live it destructively. We can live it in all sorts of ways. Or we can live it as a practice life. So that’s all I can answer there.

Interviewer: That’s a good answer. Following that in that skilful vein, for the last part I want to talk about that skilfulness that I think you try very hard to do in your life. What is your interpretation of ethics and, although I know it’s closely related to practice, there is a more ethical outlook that relates to other people. In Theravadan Buddhism it’s express in terms of precepts and so on as core activities. How do you interpret the ethical principles?
Frank: It's a very interesting question and also a very complex one because ... and it's one that has been debated in Western Zen quite a lot. You know, the precepts you can expressed as kind of ... almost like Christian commandments: thou shalt not ... alright? But there is another tradition in Zen which interprets the precepts differently.

Interviewer: But for you?

Frank: Ah ... [long pause of hesitancy]. You know it's something I don't think about very much. I really don't. I've read about it; it doesn't interest me very much [laughs]. I'll tell you why. There's a text in Zen called ‘Zazen Wasan’ by Hakuin Zenji, it's translated as ‘Song of Zazen’. And in it, it has a line and I'll try and quote it but I may get it wrong. It says, ‘The many paramittas all have their source in zazen.’ Now the paramittas are the various perfections and one of the perfections is the perfection of sila. I don't know in Theravada do you say sila or shila?

Interviewer: Sila.

Frank: Sila, the perfection of conduct. If you break down what that means it's about perfect observation of the precepts, in part. So the text says, ‘The many paramittas all have their source in zazen. The many perfections all have their source in zazen.’ I think within the tradition within which I work we understand sila or conduct not as a set of doctrines or requirements or commandments, but rather as something that we work actively within our life. So when ... as I've been talking to you and about various ways in which practice relates to real life situations, this is the practice of sila. This is not maybe ... it's maybe not observing the letter of a particular precept but it's exploring the nature of the precepts in my experience. So if I work with my feeling of ill-will toward another person, I'm exploring what that precept means in reality in my life. It doesn't mean I can observe that precept perfectly - of course not. But it means that I am constantly investigating. So my view of the precepts is that the precepts, in a sense ... and work with the precepts that arises out of our zazen, our sitting meditation, and our daily practice. That it's intrinsic, inseparable from that. That the precepts are not doctrines that need to be learnt and observed as ... because we won't ever observe those. We break them every day ... every moment [snap of fingers] we break them. We need to see that we break the precepts all the time. We need to see that we constantly break the precepts and over time then, by seeing that, by experiencing it, by working with it, we need to change those behaviours.

Interviewer: What you seem to be telling me, from what I understand, is: work with your practice ... when you work with your practice you observe things that break the precepts or emotions. Even if you don't break it, it will go against what the precept is trying to do.

Frank: Absolutely.
Interviewer: Ill-will, you not actually doing anything but you’re breaking that by having that ill-will.

Frank: Just the thought. A thought breaks the precepts.

Interviewer: So it’s a very subtle level.

Frank: I guess so. Yes, and it’s a very complex and it’s a continuous process. Because the precepts are the fabric of our life, you know. They’re the fabric of everything. They’re woven into the fabric of our life. They’re not something that stand out there and that we kind of measure ourselves against. It’s like earlier we were talking about the interconnectedness. If things are interconnected then that includes the precepts. It includes everything!

Interviewer: And supposing that the things that come up they go against the natural order of things, do you feel it straight away: this is right or wrong?

Frank: Not necessarily. I break the precepts all the time.

Interviewer: But if you are aware do you feel ...

Frank: If I become aware of that then I note what I’m doing, what I’m thinking and what I’m feeling in that situation. It’s always the practice ... practice of working with observation of mind, observation of body. It’s fundamental to all practice situations. But the interesting thing with working with the precepts or conduct or sila is that when we really break a precept we have no interest in really experiencing that. I mean experiencing it in practice terms. When we break a precept ...

Interviewer: Do you have an example in mind?

Frank: If I ... I must admit I haven’t done this for a long time ... but I do remember occasions where I’d become incredibly angry with somebody and I verbalised it ... in a hurtful way. OK? That’s breaking the precept. That moment I had no interest in the precept. Later, on reflecting on that ... and often if one breaks the precept sometimes even moments later you look back at that situation and you see what you did. And OK then the practice is the practice of acknowledgement of what you’ve done, the practice of experience in the body the residue of that, experiencing what that has left ... and always there is a residue. Always there is something in the body that holds that.

Interviewer: So I mean in terms of, say ... just going through very quickly ... some of the precepts. In Zen is it eight precepts?

Frank: There are different numbers depending on ... there are six fundamental precepts, and I know you’re going to ask me to enumerate them in a moment - I’m not going to be able to ... because I don’t work with them in that way. There are six that lay people take and then there’s a further 4 for monks ... or 4 at
another level of ordination. And then there are some other precepts that are taken at other levels of ordination.

Interviewer: Let’s say for the first one of non-killing. Do you ever kill animals?

Frank: All the time. To live is to kill. We destroy all the time. We can't avoid that. I try not to. I mean I struggle with this precept. I don't know. See ... I'm interested by ... I don't know if you've ever seen the image by a particular group of people in India, and I can't remember their names, but they actually walk around with a very soft broom and they clear the roadway in front of them so that they don’t step on an ant, and so on. I'm not like that. I don't try to step on ants, but I step on ants. I have my house fumigated so that there aren't any cockroaches and that means I kill cockroaches. Yeah. I eat meat.

Interviewer: You’re not vegetarian?

Frank: I'm not vegetarian. I eat meat. Um, yeah ... there are issues there. I don't know where I stand on those issues. I honestly don't. And I think what's important there though is ... one of the things I've observed amongst people who observe the precepts is sometimes there can be a rigidity in that. And the question always is whether my observation of the precepts contributes to clearly seeing or whether it solidifies a kind of self-identity: I am a person who ... I have the virtue of not da, da, da ... I have the virtue of not da, da, da ... Yep.

Interviewer: Some tension.

Frank: Some tension, yes. But I have a confidence that the practice will resolve this in some way. It's not something I've addressed in my practice regularly. There are other issues. I mean we use materials like this. It's wasteful. You know, I picked up four of these [packs of office papers]. I'm kind of aware of that. I have a box of paper there that is printed on one side and is going to be discarded or recycled ... at least, will be recycled. You know in this society we live incredibly wastefully and we live just assuming that we have a right to ... um ... throw away cups, plastic cups [laughs]. See ... yep, I think there are issues there and I'm as ... I was going to say as guilty but you see I don't even, I don't like that word [laughs].

Interviewer: Are some of the other precepts a little bit easier?

Frank: Well they're not easier. We break them just as readily but it is easier to see how to work with them in a way.

Interviewer: For example, what about lying?

Frank: It's not that easy to keep depending on how you conceive of what lying is. I mean, in a sense, we're lying all the time because we're always hiding behind particular identities or views of ourselves ... and there's a sense in which that is breaking the precept all the time. See, if as I speak to you ... if I want to make
myself clear, I want to give you useful answers and so on, ... but also I want to appear a certain way. No? Inevitably, as a human being, there is a certain self-identity or self-image that I project or that I attempt to project almost unconsciously ... but it’s there.

Interviewer: Almost.

Frank: Almost. You see that’s a form of lying. Lying usually has an unconscious element to it. It's like when people lie it's often they ... it's almost an unconscious action. It’s like they just do it. It’s not like, ‘Oh, I’m going to lie in this situation.’ I mean that’s much more conscious and that’s obvious. But often it’s kind of they just have a habit sometimes, in certain situations of lying. And they don’t even reflect on it. So there is a kind of unconscious process in lying or in representing oneself in a certain way which is not always true. So I think that is one aspect of lying.

Interviewer: I think that is a serious issue in our society especially when you take it a little bit further up the leadership level in our society. And then that becomes a very serious form of misleading people ... politicians ...

Frank: Because it has the potential for much damage. That’s right. And of course there are degrees of lying but it doesn’t matter what the degree is, in a way, the practice is always the same. The practice is to see, first of all, that you're doing it or that you wish to do it or you have the tendency to do it. But secondly the practice is to see where does that tendency come from. See why do you need to do that? Why does one need to misrepresent oneself in that situation? What is the nature of the insecurity out of which that comes? What is the nature of the fear, the fear of revealing oneself? What is the vulnerability out of which lies come from? What is the dishonesty? So all of those ... that’s practice in those situations.

Interviewer: Frank, things like sexual misconduct. I’ve been told by a few Australians that that is quite a difficult one because of the liberal nature of Australian society. What is your personal experience of that?

Frank: I think it is. Umm ... my view of this is that sexuality is something that is so ... it’s very powerful. Right? It's a very powerful aspect of any human identity or any human behaviour. And it’s very instinctual in a way. It's not something ... you know, they talk in psychology or in anatomy or ... I don't know, in one of those disciplines about that human beings have a part of them that is very ancient and very elemental. And then we have a psychology that is much more recent and more human and so on. And it seems to me that sexuality very much belongs to the elemental aspect. So it’s quite a difficult thing for any human being to work with. OK?

Interviewer: For you, is it easy or difficult to work with this issue?
Frank: As I get older it's easier. Yep. Because it becomes a little less important but still it's something I have had to struggle with ... as everybody has, I think. One of things that helped me in that sort of process or that struggle was ... I once heard a teacher whose name was Robert Aitken, a Zen teacher. And he wrote a very interesting book about the precepts actually. And there is a precept about the misuse of sexuality or sex. And I think before that everything I'd read about this precept was about ... was very kind of prescriptive, very legalistic. The way he expressed it was in a different way. He said, 'Not misusing sex or not using sexuality harmfully.' OK. Now, that raises all sorts of issues. What is harmful sexuality? What is the harmful use of sexuality and therefore what is misuse of sexuality? I have no interest in an idea of sexuality that says that ... that there are very prescribed forms of sexuality that are acceptable. Right? For instance, I don't believe that sexuality can only exist in marriage. I don't believe that sexuality can only exist in a heterosexual context. I believe there are many forms of sexuality and I believe that the precept can operate in relations to many different forms or expressions of sexuality.

Interviewer: How did that book help you then?

Frank: Simply because it kind of took that viewpoint and it talked about it, and it explained how that could be seen as consistent with a Buddhist viewpoint. And so I guess the question for me in relation to any issue of sexuality is about the degree of potential harm, about exploitation, about honesty. But it's a very difficult area because the potential for misuse is strong in relation to something like sexuality or sexual behaviour.

Interviewer: Frank, you don't have any children?

Frank: No, no. I'm gay.

Interviewer: Ah OK. I didn't see ... Were you married or with a partner?

Frank: No, I'm single.

Interviewer: Just single.

Frank: Not that being gay precludes one from having children because I know plenty of gay people who have children.

Interviewer: Yes. I was going to ask you ... do you have any views on children as part of practice?

Frank: Well, not really, not very considered views. I probably would have if I had children and had to confront those issues of how I'd bring children up and so on. But within the practice that we do, and that I do ... I'm not sure that I see an easy path for introducing children to this practice. This is a very subtle, a very difficult and a different ... it's a practice that ... In fact, one of the interesting things about Zen practice and about like our Zen school for instance, is that one seldom gets
even young people. You seldom get people who are teenagers or even people in their twenties. What you tend to get is people who are in their thirties, their forties who come to this practice. And when you investigate why, I think one of the reasons is that in order to see that you need to do a practice like this, you actually have to have experienced some suffering in your life. It’s not until you actually start coming up against some real difficulties in life that one starts to see the need for practice.

Interviewer: It didn’t seem like you had that experience though. It seems like you kind of …

Frank: I think I did. I mean I think I, as a child … I told you I was very ill at times and I think there was quite a lot of physical and emotional suffering involved in that. And then as a young person and through my twenties I think I did suffer a lot but it was a kind of … not from external conditions but it was from internal conditions. It was from my own sense of myself. It was from where I was caught in my own life. I mean I think in my twenties I did have some suffering also related to sexuality because it was a period where I was starting to explore that sexuality, and that was quite difficult. I mean inevitably. But I don’t think that was the central issue. I think it was … I think I was very tight. I was very ‘Hhh!’ … I was very afraid. I think I was very afraid.

Interviewer: Afraid of what?

Frank: Afraid of? I don’t know. I was afraid. [laughs]

Interviewer: This maybe a little personal but being gay when you were twenty something and this was a long time ago. I think there were a lot more prejudices and misunderstanding back then.

Frank: It was harder back then. Yes. Much easier now.

Interviewer: Was that a factor?

Frank: Oh, absolutely. Much harder than for a young person today because today it’s much easier to come out for a young person to come out. And there is a very strong gay community, all the rest of it. There are … not always, not always … I mean there are some very bad things about that community but nonetheless there is support. I think back when I was beginning to explore that aspect of my own identity it was much harder. And also I think I came from a quite conservative background. So it was quite difficult to … you know, it was quite difficult. It was quite difficult to acknowledge that … and particularly in a public sense. You know, it was quite difficult. But yes … I mean, I don’t think that aspect of my life has been that difficult. I don’t think it has been hugely difficult. It hasn’t certainly been a central aspect of the suffering in my life. I think most of my suffering has been self-created by rigidity, by perfectionism, by control and … fear that was at the basis of that.
Interviewer: Sounds like an existential fear …

Frank: Absolutely.

Interviewer: ... that you don't know what it is.

Frank: But that is what we all ... we all have that. But it’s expressed in quite different ways for each person. And for some people it's more real and more palpable. For others, it's more ... less problematical. But we all have it. And part of practice ... part of all practice is becoming aware of the fear, the existential fear which is at the basis of much human suffering.

Interviewer: Lastly, Frank, has practice made an impact on your social relations, say, with your family ... parents and so on, brothers and sisters ... and friends and so on.

Frank: Well, you know, I don’t have much family left. My parents died quite a long time ago ... more than, around 20 years ago. So I haven’t actually had very close family. I have one brother and I’m not very close to him. I mean I see him from time to time but it’s not a very close or frequent connection.

Interviewer: What about friends, colleagues or people who you don’t particularly like or get on with very well?

Frank: Well, they’re the people who I need to practice with. I mean they’re the people who I need to spend more time with, in a way. You know, if you have difficulty with something or with someone then our natural human inclination is to avoid that or to avoid that person. But practice is actually to engage with that person or that situation.

Interviewer: So do you do that?

Frank: I try to.

Interviewer: Yes?

Frank: I mean sometime I don't and sometime I do. But if I choose to do it, if I do it then I do it as a part of practice. I mean I attempt to practice with that. For instance, there are people who you don't get on with that well. There are some staff members here ... for some reason I don't know what it is but the relationship is just ... it’s just a little difficult. So you need to examine your own behaviour. You need to examine your own reactions to that person. You need then to start to explore that relationship, which means sometime putting yourself into a situation with that person where you have to engage with them. And it will bring up all sorts of stuff, all sorts of reactions. You may not enjoy it but you'll learn from it. And if you practice with it then there is some potential for that relationship to be improved.
Interviewer: And have you noticed any impact on that?

Frank: I’ve done that with a few people. Yep, yep. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn’t. It also depends on the other person’s willingness to engage. And what I’m talking about here is not kind of intense conflicts; I’m talking about kind of just ... strange differences of personality and of inclination, of approach, things like that that’s sometimes awkward.

Interviewer: It doesn’t sound like you have intense conflicts.

Frank: No. Can’t think of any.

Interviewer: You don’t look ... [laughs] and also because of the practice.

Frank: Well, I don’t know if it’s because of the practice. I may just be lucky.

Interviewer: Sorry, last one I forgot to ask was, in terms of consumption and acquisitiveness, has practice made an impact?

Frank: I think it has but I think it’s a very difficult one. You know, living in this society there are levels of acquisitiveness and possession which are just taken entirely for granted. I mean to live in this society requires ... to live and to work and to interact with this society requires that you ... I mean look at this office. I mean ... computer, telephone, sunglasses, printers, books ... you know, I mean that’s part of this society and, in a way, that’s a given. The question is: if all that was taken away then how would we feel? That’s very interesting. And one of the practices that we do in our tradition at times, is that sometimes – and it’s a practice that is commonly done, I think – sometime, maybe for a week you might remove something from your ... from access. Now, it might be – I like listening to the radio – so it might mean that for a week I just don’t listen to the radio. The radio does not get turned on. OK? Because there are interesting ABC programs that I like to listen ... and very informative and very good programs but OK just don’t listen ... right? For a week. Or I love reading. Don’t read for a week. And I just watch what happens. Food ... there might be some things that I really like to eat and that I notice that I’m eating quite a lot. Take them out for a week. Don’t go there. Don’t eat that. It’s not on the menu this week. Um ... interesting.

Interviewer: What happens?

Frank: Ah! Well, you have some reactions to that. You want them. You have craving. You get used to it and the craving goes away. It’s just experiencing ... allowing yourself to experience how attached you are to that. You know, how much of a habit it has become. You know just to get up in the morning and to turn on the radio, to listen to Radio National AM. It’s just a habit. You don’t have to do it. Instead, there’s silence. At first the silence seems really strange and a bit empty. But you get used to it. And you start to see that no habit is unchangeable, that the absence of something is fine. You can live with the absence of simple things. Now if somebody took away everything I liked and said, ‘Now practice
with that,’ I’d have a lot more difficulty [laughs]. If somebody took away my house, my money, my job and said, ‘You’re out on the streets. Practice!’ that would be profound practice. That would be very difficult.

Interviewer: You just pretend you’re in the zendo.

Frank: [laughs] Then it might rain and it doesn’t rain in the zendo.

Interviewer: OK, for me, say, sometime I have the urge to buy something and perhaps I shouldn’t buy. Maybe it’s too much or I don’t need it. But I still have that urge to buy. Maybe I’m aware to a degree. Maybe it’s not enough to be detached. What do you say to that because I think that would be a fairly common thing.

Frank: Experience that urge. Experience that urge. Before you do it, really spend some time with that feeling, with that ... take it in into your sitting practice. Sit with it. Imagine the thing that you want just momentarily and allow the feeling ‘I want it’. The feeling of wanting – allow that feeling to arise and then sit with that feeling. Just observing that feeling allowing that feeling just to percolate. Notice the thoughts that you have about that: ‘I really need this. This will be really useful for me. Well, I may not really need it but if I have this I’ll be able to do X, Y and Z that I can’t do now.’ Notice those thoughts. So you notice the thoughts that you have about wanting that object. You notice the feeling of craving; what does craving feel like? It has a feeling. ‘I want it [shaking voice]!’ So that’s all practice – it’s always that.

Interviewer: It’s difficult ... in terms of consumerism we have. That’s why I ask the question. The idea of consumerism that we do so much damage to the environment and so on.

Frank: Do you know, one of things we do in Zen is we go away for periods of what we call seshin or retreat. They’re only short. They can be up to 7 days, generally no longer than 7 days. But they’re fairly rigorous. There’s silence, getting up early in the morning, doing 10 or more hours of sitting during each day, physical work, simple meals, no entertainment, all the rest of it. And at first, the first few days are agonising because everything is taken away. But maybe the fourth or the third day you start to settle into it. By the fifth day, the sixth day sometimes you start to enjoy it. And sometime at the end of that it’s like you don’t want it to end because you’re experiencing a different way of living which has very little material about it, that is material, but it has tremendous richness about it. And I think that is what monastic life is - true monastic life - that is the quality of that. But for most lay people monastic life is not an option. So we can only taste it in this other way.

Interviewer: Are you saying those retreats have given you something in life to say that, to tell you that less material is OK?
Frank: Oh absolutely! Absolutely. It’s one of the things you learn from the retreat, is that human happiness has very little to do with possessions and objects and entertainment. It has everything to do with one’s personal inner world. And provided that there is a certain level of human comfort: you have shelter, you have a reasonably comfortable bed, you have adequate food and you have practice then, yes, that’s a very rich life. That’s potentially a very rich life and we can experience that. People who go on retreats, most people experience that. But, of course, then we come back into life and almost immediately we’re drawn back into a world of objects and possessions and requirements and demands and expectations and money and work … but that’s alright too. We shouldn’t set one of them up as an ideal and the other one as being something somewhat imperfect. Within Zen and within Mahayana Buddhism it said that the absolute and the relative interpenetrate. Now what does that mean? It means that you could say living a very pure lifestyle in a monastery or in retreat is like the absolute. It’s like the ideal. And living a daily life with polystyrene cups and students and arguments or debates, all that sort of thing, that’s living the relative life. But in Zen it says that the relative and the absolute fit together like a box and its lid. They fit together like a box and its lid. They’re like two arrows meeting in mid air. They’re one and the same. But that is something that through practice we have to come to see. We can't ... that’s theory – talking about it.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

**Correspondence**

**E-mail (2 July 2005)**
This is an e-mail reply I received having sent a summary of the interview to him. My comments or further questions are in italics while Frank’s replies to them are in blue italics.

**Personal Background (PB)**
- You grew up in a Christian family but parents were not strict or particularly devout
- You grew up learning about Christianity, was interested and had some spiritual experience of joy as a teenager similar to what a born-again Christian might experience (only if one understands this as a very real and honest experience of the spirit). However, Christian doctrines were too inconsistent for you.
- Although you had an emotionally secured childhood (loving family), childhood insecurity resulted from poor health that was at times severe.

**Encountering Buddhism**
- *The Three Pillars of Zen* was the book that triggered it all. You were searching for experiential exploration which was non-dogmatic
- Started practicing on your own, went to America and met a teacher and came back to Ashcroft where started a Zen group
• Went to Banister and met Susan Mackinsey who continues to be teacher and comes to do seshins. How do you spell her name? Susan McKinsey
• You are now an independent Zen teacher after receiving transmission.

Present Practice
• Sitting meditation (group and on your own)
• Teaching is practice
• Informal meditation during busy times e.g. in office meditation

Is your tradition the Soto strand i.e. Soto Zen? My teacher was ordained within the Soto tradition but Still Zen Group was set up by her as an independent Zen School not affiliated with Soto. Some teachers within the School retain such an association (a number are ordained within the Soto tradition) while others are lay teachers and have no affiliation with Soto. The practice approach of the school is more consistent with Soto approach than with Rinzai Zen, but also includes aspects of Vipassana practice and some approaches to practice which Susan has developed herself.

What practice involves
• Observing and experiencing feelings, thoughts and sensations while being detached from these.
• Labelling thoughts is a key component from the beginning.

Do you do breathwork in meditation? Breath practice (counting breaths, following or observing the breath in various ways) is used, however not all students begin with breath practice. Nonetheless, the breath is something strongly experiential to which we can always return in practice and it will generally be a part of most students’ practice.

Do you study koans or other things? Koan practice is most strongly associated with Rinzai Zen where it holds a central role. My teacher was also trained in this tradition but no longer systematically uses koans. At times, a koan might be brought into practice where it has particular relevance to a student’s situation. But the way I view practice is that we are constantly engaging with koans, but these are koans our life presents us with, not necessarily traditional or historically defined koans. Whenever I meet a challenge in my life, there may be one or more “life koans” involved. This is, I think, the understanding of Dogen Zenji (founder of Japanese Soto Zen) and of Bankei (Rinzia master of the 17th century).

Some profound experiences
• 25 years ago, being told, ‘Frank, things don’t have to be perfect’ was a turning point making you realise your deep attachment to control and perfection.
• Other deep experiences in meditation have occurred but these are not the goal of the practice.
• Changed the view of self and the understanding of emptiness meaning interdependence. You used the example of being a Zen leader and being aware of your every reaction to your students’ behaviour. Awareness allows you to make decisions not based on your controlling instinct but on what is really appropriate.
While this was an interesting example, I am not clear how it relates to interconnectedness. I guess the question is: how has Zen practice change your view of the world, how it works and your position in it. My teacher has described Zen practice as a progressive shift from a life of drama to a life of no-drama, or from a self-centred viewpoint to a life-centred one. We tend to view ourselves as in opposition to or separate from the world, with our experiences occurring to us. We think that if we can perfect ourselves in various ways, we will be able to overcome or control the circumstances in which we find ourself. This is a mistaken view. Since we are not, by nature, separate, it makes no sense to expend energy uselessly in this way, and it may have harmful consequences for ourselves and others. This however is different from passivity or quietism. We must engage with the world and act in it, but this needs a foundation of clear seeing and compassionate motivation. This arises from both daily “life” practice and from zazen.

Purpose in your life/practice
- In the beginning it was to be enlightened
- Now, it is to live more happily with yourself with others. Acts of awareness resonates around an interconnected world.
- The purpose of your life is to live the present reality in the most skilful way – this is living life as a practice.

In my Theravada tradition the goal of practice is enlightenment because this is regarded as outside the realm of samsara and karmic creation, and hence outside suffering. While it is true that the desire for enlightenment is a hindrance to achieving it, nevertheless it is still the ultimate goal where mundane existence ceases and emptiness is experienced in the fullest. How do you view this (samsara, rebirth, karma, enlightenment)? Do these concepts influence your life at all? If we truly practice, then enlightenment, samsara, karma and rebirth will look after themselves. They are concepts, mental constructs. Our work is to live the reality of these things as best we can day by day and moment by moment. Practice is about coming to see the nature of reality, not constructing a more complex philosophy of it.

Happiness
- One important form is joy (for lack of a better word) of being comfortable with the way things are, good or bad. It means that you have solid foundation for coping with whatever life throws at you. You give the example of taking care of an elderly relative until her death.

I believe that this view was influenced by your early years in your twenties when you suffered from uncertainties with illness and a nagging existential fear. Thus being able to cope through practice with difficult periods transform living from one that is dependent on externalities to one that is dependent on oneself. Joy arises out of realisation of one’s ability. Dependence on oneself and the confidence to do this is an important part of practice. But joy arises not from realisation of one’s ability but from realisation of who one is.
- Another form of joy is in sitting meditation (though this is not the goal). This type of joy is the true realisation of who we are.
• Happiness is not dependent on material things – this you learn from attending retreats

Ethics and precepts
• You have not studied the precepts a great deal
• Practice (zazen) is the key to ethics. Ethics are investigated through practice.
• Ethics for you occur at the subtillest level – the level of having the thought
• While you are aware of the precepts, living this present life means that you break the precepts all the time. There is some tension within you as to how best to interpret or incorporate the precepts into your life. However, you believe that practice will eventually solve this in some way.
• On environmental ethics, materialism and consumerism there is the same tension: living the modern life entails one cannot avoid some of these problems. However, Zen teaches you to understand that happiness has little to do with objects and has everything to do with our inner world.
• Despite all these issue you stress that the relative world and the absolute world interpenetrate. Hence, you do not regard any form of living as better than the others. I don’t think I would make the last statement in this form – in an absolute sense there is no difference, no distinction, but in a relative sense we make differences and distinctions, and indeed we must. This is an essential principle of Zen, sometimes called “the identity of relative and absolute”. But it is to be understood not philosophically but experientially.

Do you view any forms of livelihood as to be avoided? You are fortunate to work in the arts but what about factory farming (animal cruelty), arms dealing, businesses where one has to be economical with the truths (e.g. advertising encourages consumerism)? As a Zen teacher would you influence your students in this matter? My role as a teacher is firstly not to judge. Then my role is to assist students to come to know themselves more fully and honestly and to see how what they do and believe affects themselves and those around them. I have never had a student who is an arms dealer or involved in animal cruelty or engaged in systematic lying. If I did, I would simply try to work with them as a person, to understand them and their life circumstances, and to assist them to see more clearly. At the same time, I would personally also have to work with the koan that such a student presented me with. A teacher influences by example and by their own practice not by dogmatic assertion. That doesn’t rule out strong assertive statement, but that needs to be handled very carefully and wisely.

Has the practice of Zen changed the way you view, relate to, or impact on living and non-living nature (from before you took up Zen)? Hopefully, it has made me more mindful and questioning of my actions and motives, but that is for others to judge. My chief responsibility is to work honestly with the bit of “living nature” that is called Frank Jackson. From that will arise an influence on the living and non-living nature around us.

E-mail (22 July 2005)
This reply came following my further comments. Frank’s replies are in blue italics.
I love your replies especially this one:

"If we truly practice, then enlightenment, samsara, karma and rebirth will look after themselves. They are concepts, mental constructs. Our work is to live the reality of these things as best we can day by day and moment by moment. Practice is about coming to see the nature of reality, not constructing a more complex philosophy of it."

Very true! My teacher emphasises simplicity of practice very similar to yours without Theravadan dogmas. We practice by observing thoughts, etc. Stories has it that his teacher was a disciple of one of the Ch'an master in China in his past life a thousand years ago - reasonable I guess. My only quibble might be that continuous dedicated practice for most people (perhaps not you?) is hard. Often we become slack in practice and there are periods of ups and downs which is normal. During a down period it is important to find ways to pick up practice again or, more seriously, not to abandon practice altogether (eg. out of disillusionment). In Thailand, faith often becomes an important tool to assist and cosmological explanation even in their simplification can be useful. For example, just a simple fear of rebirth as suffering can help refocus practice. My question is this:

1. I find it difficult to understand how your Western students can fully commit themselves to Zen other than as a self-help tool because of their cultural background?

I think "continuous dedicated practice" is difficult for everyone, not least me. Practice inevitably involves the kind of ups and downs you refer to. The important thing is to keep up some momentum, so that even in the down times, there is still some practice happening. Now, in time, practice does develop such a momentum - the Tibetans talk about the awakening of bodhicitta, the aspiration to enlightenment. When this is truly awakened then one's life begins to become an expression of practice, rather than practice being something separate that one does because that is desirable or virtuous. But always effort is required. Practice in a Western context presents special challenges. It is really only 50-75 years since practice was strongly planted in many Western contexts (and less in Australia). We are just beginning to find our way, just as was the case when the Dharma first arrived in China or Japan or perhaps Thailand. And just as in each of those places, the Dharma eventually found its cultural expression, so too in the West, it will need to do so. I can't predict how that will proceed, but I do feel that we are engaged in a very important process. The cultural expressions of Buddhism, with their specific forms and structures that have existed in the older Buddhist cultures can not be wholly transplanted successfully. We need to evolve our own forms and structures, and in modest ways that is happening. This is not about Zen practice (or Dharma practice more widely) becoming a "self-help tool". Students who have that view don't stay in the practice very long. Rather it is about radical transformation of our view of self and others. This work is spiritual and transpersonal not psychological. The kind of structures that are used to support people in such a process are the development of small dharma practice groups often meeting in homes like my own group (in Christianity such a development is known as the house-church model), the emergence of local
teachers, the use of retreats and intensives (in our tradition, residential seshin of 3 – 7 days duration), and other methods - for example, in my group we are currently running a Practice Period of 3 weeks during which people commit to intensify their practice in various ways, focus on some specific practice tasks, attend a variety of additional sitting events, report to the teacher regularly on their work etc. It is the teacher's job to create the structures and opportunities for people to practice effectively. How well they use those opportunities is up to them. Amongst my own students I have the full range, from the highly committed to those who are really just putting a toe in the water. I think that is probably much the same everywhere, even in traditionally Buddhist countries.

2. I don't see how your Zen practice can reach a wider audience without asserting some fundamental cosmological foundation in Buddhism. Otherwise, it remains a practice for the fortunate few like yourself who for some reason 'discovered' it. I think that many will find the Tibetan tradition with a more detailed worldview more appealing (of course, some won't).

The beauty of the Dharma is that while it is essentially one, it has many contingent expressions. For those for whom a devotional practice or a more philosophical one or a doctrinal one is appropriate, then there are various forms of Buddhism, practices and sects they can turn to. I don't see it as necessary to try to make Zen practice palatable to a wider audience. My responsibility is to be true to the Dharma. If I can do that together with 20 people then that is enough. This is not about marketing, but about deep change. Some expressions of Buddhism have a wide appeal and currency at present, but that isn't always a good thing. Is that appeal helping to build a true and deeply-held commitment or is it merely a passing fashion? Are bigger, richer and more powerful institutions necessarily to the benefit of Dharma? Not necessarily.

E-mail (29 August 2005)
This is an e-mail received after my further questioning.

Dear Frank,

Again reading through our conversation I read your statement describing when you were deputy director:
"And I had a very demanding boss. So his demands and expectations were very useful for me because they really touch those difficult places for me which were about getting things right, being perfect."

It then occurred to me that you would have been also a demanding boss. Nice, kind but nevertheless very demanding. I assume this because you have perfectionist tendencies - generally not good for subordinates. Am I correct and have you changed as a boss?

Perfectionism, like all human tendencies, can be either a positive or a negative thing. Perfectionists can be highly demanding, judgmental and punitive, both to themselves and to others. This is the negative side. The positive side is that perfectionistic people are very useful and effective in getting things done. The challenge is to harness the positive features of a desire to do things as well as
possible, without negative effects on oneself or others. This is a practice issue and anyone practising effectively with this would monitor their tendencies to judge harshly, to speak punitively or to stress out. The alternatives to these are to pay attention to the reality of what is really happening (not the way it "should" be), to pay attention to the needs of others and act helpfully and supportively, and, over time, to learn to become comfortable with imperfection. That has been part of my practice over many years, which, needless to say, I have not always lived up to completely.

One other point here - we may think that anxiety about perfection/imperfection is only an issue for those we call "perfectionists" but in fact, it is a central issue for all human beings. My understanding of the term Dukkha includes anxiety with the imperfect, uncontrollable, and transitory nature of human existence. Perfectionism, as a human trait, is just one of many human expressions of dukkha. In a central text of the Zen tradition, Japanese title: Shinjinmei (also sometimes known as the Sutra of the Third Patriarch), it says somewhere that in enlightenment there is no longer anxiety about perfection or imperfection.

E-mail (14 December 2006)
This is an e-mail received after my further questioning and also contains my understanding which needed confirmation. It was sent and received during the writing of the personal sustainability and paradigm section. Frank’s answers are in blue.

I've identified 3 major factors that seemed to be impediments to personal sustainability earlier in your life.
These are:
1. Physical suffering as a child and early adulthood
2. Existential fear
3. Compulsion toward perfectionism and control causing suffering. This suffering I assume is agitation, feelings of ill-at-ease and anger. It is mental suffering, perturbation of the mind.

If this is a reasonable summary, please say 'Yes'. If not please add or elaborate.
Answer: Yes.

These are some questions and thoughts on how you've overcome them (to a greater or lesser extent) and the change that has occurred.
1. With regards to physical suffering, this is unavoidable with human existence. Has your Zen practice address this issue in any way?
Answer: My understanding of physical suffering is that it is unavoidable in human life, however what we can practice with is what we add to that. Master Rinzai spoke of adding another head on top of our own - becoming mentally obsessed with something or obsessively anxious. These are things that all Buddhist practice addresses, including Zen. The Tibetans speak of the practice of transformation of suffering and this is a good way of describing what is a complex process. In Zen terms we become more willing to be with whatever is presented to us, to enter into its direct and unmediated experience and not to indulge
obsessive thinking. This is relevant to the various forms of moderate suffering and pain (rather than intractable suffering).

2. Existential fear
This is also part of being human. Practice is about acknowledging it, but what has that process done for you over the past 30 years specifically regarding fear?
Answer: One gets to know fear as simply a set of thoughts and bodily sensations which do not have to rule our lives or our responses to other people and situations. There is a Zen saying, "Embrace the tiger." If we can fully embrace the tiger of our own reactivity, then fear has been transformed. Of course, this is always incomplete. (Of course, this is relevant to the kind of psychological fear we experience. There is a much more elemental kind of fear which is about survival which I think is another matter.)

3. Perfectionism. This is a work in progress for you, a practice that you work with regularly. I don't believe that your perfectionist tendencies have been eliminated (nor is it the goal) but it seems you are much more conscious of it and less attached to it and the associated outcomes?
Answer: One's tendencies are never completely eliminated. That's why practice is for a life time or more. But like fear above, this tendency can largely cease to be a problem or a ruling motivation.

Perfectionism also suggests to me that at an earlier age there would have been a much stronger reaction to events that did not go your way or what you thought was right. The usual form of reaction is anger including irritation, frustration, etc. Has the reactionary forces become more subdued and what do you credit this to the most?
Answer: Yes, I attribute this to the process described above.

Field notes
20 May 2005
• I arrived early at the University. It was a nice building 3 storey high and where the rooms were there was a courtyard with many trees. While I waited for Frank who was not at the room yet, I walked down the corridor where people were practicing. In one room a girl was practicing opera and I stood outside and listened to her beautiful voice. It felt great. I felt that waiting was great and I had quite good awareness and walked meditation. This seemed to forebode well for the interview.
• Frank arrived promptly just before 10am. He was very pleasant and smiled. He was bold and seemed gentle. We first went to pick up tea and coffee and brought them up back to the room. Frank was generous and paid for my tea, about $2.
• I had a good impression of him straight away. He was kind, a kind and decent man. He told me about his musical teachings. He was teaching the Indonesian instrument (Garong) and had a picture of his student band
playing. He obviously liked his profession and music. I told him I liked music too but was not good with the rhythm and piano. Oh Well!

- His office was fairly small or reasonably – just a university office with lots of book, a window and noisy air conditioning.
- Throughout the interview he was calm, showed little emotions but always exuded kindness, sincerity and serene pleasantness. This is a real contrast to Mia who was very emotional. I could not tell he was gay by his demeanour or general outlook although I was surprised when he told me so. It just caught me by surprise since I was not expecting. But why not, even better.

**Member Check Reply**

These are correction statements of or additions to original pieces I wrote about Frank on personal sustainability and paradigm. I sent him a Word document and he inserted these points in the appropriate places:

- I may have said this, or something like it, but really that fear is describable, in the sense that the need to control one’s environment, which is what perfectionism is about, is a response to some kind of feeling of vulnerability and lack of control. This is the “insubstantiality” of things that the Buddha talks of. The fear which is at the core of all human beings is concerned with a perception of this and a sense of powerlessness in its face.
- better to say “authorisation to teach independently” since ‘dharma transmission’ is a little understood and somewhat inflated term
- Group sits twice a week now
- **But while the body is important the primary focus is on the mind and hence bodily reactions are observed as associated with mental activities rather by themselves** (my original text) - I would not agree with this statement – ultimately experiencing the body, “re-embodying” the practice, is central. But if thinking is active, then we need to start with it until we can proceed into the body. It is in the body and in the direct and unmediated experience of it as the container of our experience that true healing takes place and through which we open a window into something greater.
- Fundamentally, practice is not about any technique or set of tools; it is not about “doing” anything. It is, as Dogen-zenji says, about the dropping away of body and mind. It is important that we don’t take the provisional steps in practice (important though they are) as complete.
- But seeing needs to happen over and over again, and the truth of those moments must be meticulously actualised in one’s life and everyday practice.
- **come to term with** (my original words) - “fully acknowledge” is a better way of expressing this] the feeling of animosity toward others. Once it is truthfully seen and acknowledged, we have the opportunity to avoid following its beckoning
- I think the preceding passage is problematical. I would say that the paradigm is to see clearly when our thoughts are real and when they are not. When we are emotionally invested in our thinking and allow ourselves to spin emotion-based thoughts about another person or a situation, then these unexamined thoughts may be regarded as “unreal” as not rooted in objective reality, but
rooted in our self-centred preoccupations. The task for a student is to come to see that such thoughts, which are common for a human being, do not constitute objective reality, but a filtered and unexamined version of it. Practice is always about returning to “what is true right now”, not believing everything we are telling ourselves about ourselves, others or the situations we encounter.
ISAAC

Interview

Part 1 (12 April 05)

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit about yourself and your work.

Isaac: I do intercultural work with aboriginal people. I teach at a Laos Temple in Brighton occasionally. I was a psychotherapist for 15 years or more.

Interviewer: Was that in the Western tradition?

Isaac: My own tradition [laughs]. I started the first group for violent men [in domestic violence] in Georgialand. So based in Buddhism and then I learnt a few psychotherapeutic techniques. But I had no formal qualifications. Government departments and psychologists would come and see me but they couldn’t refer people to me and have them pay for it, and people would come privately. But I earned a living doing that. But there were only two people at the Health Department that referred people to myself and a clinical psychologist in Thomsonville. Before that I was a fine woodworker and sculptor/community artist. Then I did several years with profoundly disable children and while I was doing that I started, on a voluntary basis, running groups for violent men, and, of course, the partners needed to talk to somebody. So the head of psychiatric department in Kenwood gave me a room at the clinic and I used to just see people there. And then I thought, “Ah, well!” ... my psychologist friends said, “Just hand your shingle up,” so I started working with whoever came.

Interviewer: You’ve had an interesting career.

Isaac: After I came back from Thailand I was a woodworker/sculptor and community artist.

Interviewer: Were you brought up as in a Christian family?

Isaac: No, not overtly Christian. I was more interested in those things than my parents. I went to all sorts of Sunday schools – they said, “They’re all the same. Go to different ones if you want.”

Interviewer: Why did you take an interest in Buddhism?

Isaac: Buddhism came about ... my meeting with it ... at the age of 15 I left school and I worked in the antique business and I had my own shop by the time I was 16. I sold that and I was in Brighton by the age of 17 or 18. I was 18 and I went to Angus and Robertson bookshop to get a book on blue and white porcelain, Chinese blue and white porcelain. I picked up a book on Japanese Haiku – R. H.
Bligh’s 2-volume set on Haiku poetry. I flipped the book open as I often do, looked at what was there and there was a verse about Camellia petals blowing in the wind, and something turned over in my heart - that was it! I realised later that the verse was an allusion to the 8 winds of the world, the 8 worldly things: praise/blame, gain/loss ... So I started to devour books of Chinese and Japanese poetry in translation. Through that I came across this thing call Buddhism and Daoism. In those days, in the early 70’s, there was nothing around really. So I thought well I will have to go to Asia and so I started studying Japanese and Chinese. I went back to night school and ended up with a tutor in Chinese and Japanese. I had a falling out with him who was a bit of a wild man. I went to Brighton University and this lovely eccentric professor, Mr. Davies, ... I told him my predicament: “I don’t have a tutor and am trying to do the last 2 years of high school in 1 year.” So he said come here! We won't tell anybody. All the tutors will mark your work as though you were a student. There I met a student of a Singhalese monk in the Blue Mountains but they sort of guarded in jealously – I never met this person – but he told me about the Chinese Buddhist Society in Sussex Street, Brighton. I went there on Saturday night at the Pure Land School. The first night I was there was the first night Khantipalo went there. He had just arrived in Australia that week. Dhammayuda sent him over to Australia and so I did the Pure Land service and Khantipalo gave a dharma talk. So the Chinese community – didn’t matter that’s it was a different tradition – so he gave the dharma talk. So that was my first contact with living Buddhists.

Interviewer: But Isaac, before that, you came across the poem in a bookshop. What was that about?

Isaac: The Eight Winds of the World but it didn’t say anything about that. It was just the poem: three lines about Camellia petals being blown in the wind. I realised later after I’d studied that this Haiku was about. It’s talking about the fragility of life and the way these winds of the world blow us about. But I read it and, as I said, it turned over something.

Interviewer: Did it really hit you?

Isaac: Yes, it just hit me ... pphhmm! And so I bought lots of books on Chinese and Japanese poetry and that was my entrance into dharma. Khantipalo was there and others and I started to learn that there were all sorts of Buddhism, and I ended up deciding I wanted to go to Thailand. I was living in the Chinese temple while I was saving up. Used to cook up all the Malaysian/Chinese students who’d do Pure Land and the Theravada ... [laughs]. Some people came to talk in Sydney from up here at the Buddhist Society of New South Wales and those people were Mark Shane and his partner then, Jane. They came and they’d just come back from India, and they said we want somebody to come and teach meditation up in Narung. So I was sent there. I was upasika with shaved head, white robe. I came up first to see if it would be OK, suitable and I went back and said, “Yes, I would be fine.”

Interviewer: Had you gone to Thailand by this time?
Isaac: No, no. That was later.

Interviewer: But you had shaved your head ...

Isaac: Yes, 8 precepts and I was living at the Chinese temple. I was also working for Mr. Liao in his furniture business saving my money up to go to Thailand. So I’ve been Mahayana/Theravada all along the line. So I ended up coming here with Khantipalo as his assistant while Khantipalo taught the first meditation retreats in Australia.

Interviewer: Is he Thai or Sri Lankan, Khantipalo?

Isaac: He was ordained in Thailand but he is English and he was a bhikkhu for over 30 years. He disrobed and lives in Cairn now. So the Sangharaja sent dharmadhatu monks over to Australia to look after the Thai community in Brighton but also Westerners – spreading the dharma. I was Khantipalo’s assistant and we did 4 retreats here. This is in 1971-72 and in Queensland, a few retreats. Then after that went back to Brighton and hitchhiked to Darwin and went to Asia – Thailand.

Interviewer: And did you start practicing meditation when you met Khantipalo?

Isaac: Yes. We do some basic meditation practice there and I’d go out to the house where they were, the wat, and did some walking meditation there. So that was over 30 years ago now.

Interviewer: And you went to Thailand?

Isaac: For 6, 8 months, something like that.

Interviewer: Were you ordained there?

Isaac: Yes, at Wat Bavorn. I met the wife of the then prime minister of Thailand, Khunying Usana Pramoj, when I was in Brighton and she came to the wat. And she said, “When you come to Thailand I will be your mother.” So that caused a bit of a stir at the wat [laughs]. On my ordination day and Khunying Usana turned up with the robe and bowl for me – Senee Pramoj couldn’t come, he was too busy. She was a dynamite. So that was funny. It was funny nobody knew ... just turned up and one of the ... it’s funny, one of the monk was chanting away and ... she came a bit late and he looked up and ... [laughs] .... it was like double take. So funny.

Interviewer: How was your experience in Thailand?

Isaac: Very good. I was fortunate to ... or at that time Ajahn Mahabua ... I met some of the Western monks when Ajahn Mahabua was in Bangkok and he wasn’t taking in any more people but after some time I wrote a letter to them and
said, “Well, I don’t know what I’m doing here in Bangkok. It’s pretty ridiculous and I’m better off in Australia. They said, “Come!” Though I was old enough to take full ordination I didn’t; I took samanara ordination but I had to – because I stood out like a sore thumb – I had to observe all the bhikkhu precepts. Anyway, I really enjoyed that ... meeting the people and getting a sense of Buddhism in practice in a country. I remember one Christmas ... it was Christmas time and I wanted to get out of Bangkok and practice and somebody told me about a cave monastery north of Bangkok, and so I caught a bus up there. They didn’t speak much English. The first day on alms round I went out with the abbot and walking through the fields – there’re no roads – and came to this house and there was this old lady there, the grandmother of the house. She was putting food into the bowl and when she saw my hands she ... she was just looking down, she saw my hands and looked up, big shock. And the next day we got to the same place and the daughter of the house was there and she must have ... they were very poor people but she had the finest clothes on and beautiful jewels like they’d probably got them all around the place. It was lovely that they were so moved that I’d come there to practice. So we helped their faith and it was big respect. When I tell people that story they often think, “Was she trying to marry you or something?” I said, “No, it’s all about respect and devotion to the sangha, not me personally but to the sangha.” Even though I was technically a novice the local town heard that I was there ... and somebody got married and they asked me to ... all the monks were going to do the blessings and so they wanted me to come as well ... Lovely! And meeting big teachers like Ajahn Mahabua, going to Ajahn Lee Dhammadaro’s wat was very powerful. He was dead a long time but ... again not many people spoke English there. There was one man who had retired from the civil service. They had this evening chanting. I’d just arrived and it was like we were happy friends together with little language.

Interviewer: Was Ajahn Lee a lay person?

Isaac: No, Ajahn Lee Dhammadaro was a student of Ajahn Mun. Wat Asokaram. We’re doing evening chanting and prostrating to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and then everybody turned around and prostrated to the wall. It looked like an empty shrine to me and as I was turning around I experienced piti through my body. I had had it in meditation before and so I knew what it was but I couldn’t understand what was happening. So I was able to keep going while all this was going on [laughs] and after the chanting I said, “Why did you all turn around?” They said, “Than Ajahn.” And I said, “What happened?” because when piti comes your face is all ... so they could tell that something had happened to me. It makes your complexion go all different. I told them what had happened and they said, “Than Ajahn, Than Ajahn.” And I said, “What do you mean?” They said, “Than Ajahn’s there.” What I thought was an empty shrine, he was in there. His path to awakening was anapanasati and after he died his body stayed fresh and the people didn’t want to burn him. They put him in a box. I got there 10 years later and he was still in the box – fresh!

Interviewer: Fresh?
Isaac: Apparently, I didn’t look [laughs]. But it was interesting, I was at Dhammananda 10 years later I realised what that was about. I was walking across the paddock to milk the cows and I was just reflecting and then I understood that at that time I was ... my head wasn’t full of ideas about how you should be or do this. There was a lovely circumstance at the wat and we didn’t teach much Thai or English together but there was that good feeling, good happy feeling together, good companionship ... and my heart was not full of imaginings. Like when I went to Ajahn Mahabua’s wat ... Khantipalo had said, “Oh you have to do this and this and this,” and there I am sitting there waiting like this, waiting for Ajahn Mahabua to return in the full vinaya fashion ... return the wai. And guys had to tell me to just prostrate and go. So when I was at Ajahn Lee’s wat it was like that passage in the Christian gospel: ‘Unless you become as little children you can’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’ You know, less fabrications, less construct, just a more natural state of mind, a easy state of mind. And in that easy state of mind you’re receptive to the energy of the place, the influence of the ... technically I suppose it’s the devas around. And you show respect and you’ve got an open heart and it’s like a blessing. So what this all boils down to, when it came time for me to ... I’d been a covert Buddhist ... as a psychotherapist you drew a lot on Buddhism ... but 5 years ago I decided I didn’t like the way the dharma is being taught too much in the West – I hadn’t liked it a lot - because I didn’t see that people were getting benefits that I thought should be coming in terms of meditation states: a bit of joy, bit of rapture ... that’s not enlightenment but it is very nice for the body. I realised that a lot of Westerners had been going to retreats with different teachers and didn’t seem to know what they were doing. Sit down and no focus, no resolve, whatever. It was too hit and miss. So go to a retreat, come out and maybe they did some sitting or whatever but didn’t seem to hit. And the whole thing of sangha was missed out on at both levels. No understanding of the role of monks and nuns – there’s that level of sangha. A sort of childish anti-authoritarian streak about all of that. You know, not understanding what the sangha is for. And then, though there’s lip service about community and ‘we’re sangha together,’ the affective, the feeling level is not there. So I sort of avoided the Western groupings; I’d be with my basic Theravadan practice but I’d rather go and chant with some Pure Land practitioners because the feeling was right. So the feeling that comes of the heart: metta, dana, friendliness, this that and the other, not just intellectual understanding.

Interviewer: I seems that the culture of Buddhism made a big impact on you.

Isaac: Yeah, the culture and the teaching because the Buddha, to my understanding, is a total social revolutionary. There’s a lovely book called Buddha in the Jungle and is a study of Buddhism in Thailand in the 19th and early 20th century from the Forest Tradition from Western travellers, and to see what was there before the Sangha Act of 1901 ripped it into pieces: people living their lives according to dharma principles, what does that do, how does that affect the culture. So the sangha aspect is important to me. So when I started teaching, I said OK I can whinge – good Australian word – about all this as much as I like ... in my view people don’t understand what dharma is about. I sort of couldn’t
I understand what people were ... like for 10 years going to meditation retreats and then if they’ve got a problem it would be off to Western pop psychology. I said there’re treasures in there, you know. Study, for God’s sake! People wouldn’t study. They don’t know what’s in the teachings enough, really. And so I said, well, don’t be reactive and whinge about it. So I started teaching a class. I made a resolve: in order for dharma to go here, there needs to be a place where people can come. So I made a resolve that every Monday night I’d be teaching in Muirfield and every Tuesday night in Kenwood.

Interviewer: I really like that idea of the *sangha* but being an Australian why did you feel so strongly about that concept which doesn’t really exist much here? Why?

Isaac: Well community does exist or did exist here. So everywhere in the West the notion of community is under assault. The forces of economic rationalism and materialism to turn each person into an individual consuming unit. So you don’t just have one television in the house but five, one in each bedroom, and on and on. So the community capital is destroyed. It’s hard to get people on community committees now because people don’t know how to do it. All of that knowledge is getting lost. You can see in Thailand that practiced traditions can die out in two generations and that’s what happens here. That capital, that community capital/resource of knowing how to work in groups, community groups, we’ve exploited in the West. We’ve mined the resource that we didn’t realise we had. People from Church groups and little community associations, etc. And in one generation economic rationalists wiped it out. Not entirely but it is really hard. So I come from a very, very poor background: bush people, whatever. I wouldn’t even fit into Marx’s working class; we’re peasant class – peasants, poor white trash. I’ve got aboriginal relatives, you know. I haven’t got aboriginal blood but aboriginal relatives. I come from a poor background. So I’m outside of what Stalin did. He wiped out the peasants because you don’t fit into the scheme: you’re not petty bourgeois, you’re not working class, you’re not owning class. So they just got rid of them, the peasant. So when I came to live here on communities ... see something needs to happen when somebody needs a hand, I’d go and help them.

Interviewer: When was this?

Isaac: This was when I came back from Thailand, a few years after Abby and I were married – about 28 years ago. First came to this area to the early communities, Buddhist-based in some sense. My background is very different from everybody’s background who came from middle class or whatever. So I’d see somebody needed a hand and, OK, I’d go and give them a hand. But then I’d be doing all of these things and, looking around, where’s the help? And then I found out that I had to go and ask at community meetings for help. People didn’t realise. Like in Thailand, in the 19th century, the early 20th century or even now, you look at what’s going and if people didn’t work together they’d die.
Interviewer: What then did you like about the sangha aspect? Did you have that sense about community before you went to Thailand?

Isaac: Sort of ... see ... not really. I was into what Buddhism all about, finding out more about the teaching and practice. But I’m a ... as indicated by my first story about the poem, I’m a feeling and intuitive sort of person though I can do the intellectual things as well. But the first, there is an intuitive response to things. So I don’t remember much of the formal teachings that I received, but what I do remember are the stories around and about the teachers, and my experience of how they acted. Ajahn Mahabua is supposed to be this real tough old dude but that’s not my experience of him. What I saw was quite a humourous person. On the first day of alms round – everybody is terrified of this bloke – and we go on alms round and down near the village, there’s a chicken asleep on the road with one leg up. And he turns around with this grin on his face and sneaks up on this chicken and catches it with his toes. And the chicken of course goes ‘Qwerk, Qwerk, Qwerk’ [imitating chicken noise] ... and he turns around and says something about the value of mindfulness. Then walks on. And walking on, you’d see that out of his robes his hands going up like this ‘pphhm’: he is getting sticky rice and spitting on, rice is dropping down, he’s blessing the rice and the dogs are coming and getting it. Then he would go a bit further on and throws a ball of sticky rice over to the chucks there. And he’d stop and everybody sees what he’s done. The chicken mother comes over and she pecks the ball to pieces so the little chicken can come and eat the rice. And then he turns and he says, “That’s metta.” And we’d be in the ... I’d sort of feel him ... I’d be in my little hut, the last little hut in Wat Pa Ban That – thatched roof, little tiny thing – and I’d be sitting there or lying there or whatever, and I’d get a feeling and would go out and he would be walking by or something. So to me it was a big play he was doing with people. Because my big memory of him is those things, and whenever one of his students who had attained awakening comes there I would hear them laughing all the time [laughs]. So different. So I saw him, and his outward demeanour was shoulder to the wall. Ajahn Tade. Ajahn Mahabua would ... if there’s an obstacle you push it down. Ajahn Fuan, you melt it with love. Ajahn Tade, he’s got very sharp intellect and he’d like slip through the crack. Just different qualities of expression. You know at the time of the Buddha people could go on and had the Buddha as the teacher ... or Mahamokalana [a key disciple of the Buddha] but their affinity went to this one or this one or this one. Different ways of expression. So there’s that level of community where you have to understand that there’re these appearances of how people are and we have affinities. But what holds it all together is the teaching of the sanghavatthu, the four sanghavatthus - the base, the foundation of community or sangha. Lovely qualities of attacharya [beneficial action for all], and the fourth one, kind speech. So what is it for, the teachings? It doesn’t exist without friends. The only reason I can do it is a long line of friends going back 2,5000 years ago who shared it. And the Buddha said that kalyanamitta - good, noble, uplifting friendship - is the entirety of the brahmachariya, the spiritual life. And he said that there is no other external factor of greater importance to the attainment of liberation than kalyanamitta. So that’s what community, sangha, is for me. Kalyanamitta and the teachings: kalyanamitta at the beginning, in the middle and at the end; good, beautiful and
uplifting. So that informs how I teach in my groups. They're noisy. People come and they're meeting their friends, and it's noisy ... talking this, that and the other. Then we settle down and do some meditation practices ... then talk and have a cup of tea and more conversation. And then we come back in and do a little more. Then I chant and do the things and maybe some more meditation and then at the end people hang around and talk with each other because there is a great need for the sangha treasure. It seems to me that [for] too many groups from my understanding ... a bunch of strangers comes, meet in silence, go and meditate ... and then go. So I thought OK, for something to happen here, I wanted a centre to happen. It can't happen without a community. Got to be. I didn't know it had happened but it's happened. My friend Santidham came up ... we talked a few years ago and we're very different personalities etc. but it doesn't ... I don't care! We're friends in dhamma, kalyanamitta. He came up and I said, “Let’s just do it.” We met a Thai man up the road ... and I organised a community meeting up the road. He got Thai and Laos people to come. I got Westerners to come and just said what we wanted to do. And a man, a Westerner who comes to my group, offered the land. And that was three months ago.

Interviewer: How is your concept of kalyanamitta and friendship working for you?

Isaac: It’s building. When I was a psychotherapist I used the same model: kalyanamitta. So I was always open to the relationship with somebody expanding beyond the formalistic thing which is actually a bigger ask than just paying your money and disappearing. So I used kalyanamitta. So the person comes and sees me and, yeah, their life may be falling apart here, but over here it’s not. I know a lot more about this than they do but they know a lot more about that than I do. So there’s basis for mutual respect. And you meet people and you can be friends.

Interviewer: Are you saying that with your patients you developed a larger relationship than the professional one?

Isaac: Yes. Yes, be friends.

Interviewer: Did you see them outside?

Isaac: Outside, you’re not supposed to ... In the Western model that is a no-no. But you just compartmentalise your life and that’s ridiculous. We’re all just human beings making our way. I’m no arahant or stream-enterer or whatever, but I know a few things. Like it says in the text: “If you want to learn meditation, then go to an arahant; if the arahant is not available then goes to the next one down like a stream-enterer; if they’re not available, somebody who knows the practice; if they’re not available, someone who knows the theory.” So ‘phum, phum, phum, phum’ [noise indicating moving down a chain]. You just do it. So I’m open with people. I don’t know everything. We’re in it together. Until we attain awakening we’re all mentally ill [laughs].

Interviewer: That is one way of putting it [laughs].
Isaac: In a sense, you know. It’s hard for people to understand that ... that I’m open to ... being friends. Often, what happens is that people’s inferiority complexes come up and they distance themselves. Or they’d want to put you up on to a pedestal. Or something like that.

Interviewer: Even in Buddhist practice, they want to put you up as the teacher?

Isaac: Yes, that’s right. And there’s benefit in that in some levels but friendship but ... what puts you in the fire more is that if you actually have kalyanamitta going, and that you’re working together to draw the good out in each other. We keep each other honest and things like that.

Interviewer: Has that idea of kalyanamitta translated into your community action?

Isaac: Yes, at different levels. So there are various things that I do what I can to help. So one of my large community action is this group I run, and it is bearing fruit in a monastery and a practice place - a monastic sangha and a lay sangha [referring to the newly founded meditation centre especially for monks who are displaced from Asia and the Zen centre in Kenwood]. People slowly get the idea that we’re in this together. They come to the group for that feeling and then find in practice that you can have that feeling all the time - in meditative practice and the practical application of the practice in your daily life. How do you integrate this into your life? You can't be in formal meditative practice all the time if you’re a layperson, but you can have some experiments going on. So simply the notion of awareness, of sati, is of enormous benefits to people. I’ve had a woman recently in Muirfield came and she said, “I’ve just been to a funeral”, and she’s been to 10 funerals in the last few years as there’s been much deaths around her, and she had developed a phobia. And she’d go to another thing [funeral] and would be caught up in her own anxiety and fear. And she said, “I went to this funeral and was dreading going to the funeral. I got to the funeral and then, like out of nowhere, some awareness came: ‘What am I doing? Why am I here? What is this funeral for? I’m here to support the family and friends. Yes, I am one of those friends but here I am lost, locked in my own selfishness, my anxiety and trembling fear.’ ” And she said it was completely different for her. The only thing that is different in her life is coming along and doing a little bit of meditation. So it only takes a tiny bit. It's hard to develop a sense of community. People are suspicious. Like even developing a monastery which belongs to Western forms of Buddhism and they’re sort of keeping their distance or whatever. Monks - they don’t understand what we’re trying to do. But I know that - that's fine. Just keep going, keep going and the influence will spread out. They will understand and that’s fine. You have to have patience. The Buddha said, “Patience is the greatest austerity.”

Interviewer: Do you believe that your concept of friendship, sangha, and the centre will have an effect on the greater community?

Isaac: Yes, yes. It’s already happened. Like in my groups I’ve run them up til now through adult community education. So the first group happened and people
asked me, said, “This is really good. I want to keep it happening. So I said, “OK, the tradition is you ask the teacher to teach, and [he] teaches.” So I just kept the group going for 5 years. So the adult community education classes come in every few months for 6 weeks. This class has been going for several years. “You’re coming in for 6 weeks. If you want you can come more. If you don’t like it you just come once. If you want to drop in sometime in the future it will be here. So many ... several hundred people have been through doing the 6 weeks and some of them ... I have committed groups of 20 or so people in Muirfield and Kenwood. They don’t all come at once.

Interviewer: Is it just meditation or learning the theory as well?

Isaac: Learning the theory ... so when I’m there ... my style now is ... a person asks a question and we’re off. I don’t prepare anything ... Forest Tradition, you just what’s coming up ... ‘pphmmm’ you go for it. I call it ‘Meditation and Conversation’. We need it in our community too: good conversation. It’s a rare jewel now.

Interviewer: So you’re implying that those 2 things are being practiced at your gathering?

Isaac: Yes. Meditation and conversation. So a theme will come up and they I’ll say, “OK, into small groups. Talk about it. What does this mean to you? Tonight it might be ‘What does sustainability mean to you?’” And then talk in a small group because it’s easier. And then feed back into the larger group. Dialogue means ‘di – through,’ ‘logos – meaning’ ... meaning passing between people or through a group. So I say to people, “If you don’t respect your knowing, your wisdom, then you can’t respect anybody else’s.” So people have understandings there. They might not be meditators but they have a realisation, an understanding. I say, “Make a big deal of it. This is your realisation. You’ve got to put it into practice but you understand it.” We understand so many things and never act on it. If we’re out in the sun too much we’ll get cancer. I wear a hat; not many people do. We know these things but we don’t do them. We know that the sky’s falling. We know that the world’s burning up but we don’t do anything.

Interviewer: So how are you trying to get people to act on what they know?

Isaac: In this sense, it’s starting with their own lives that ... the Five Recollections ... in short hand: I’m of the nature to get sick; I will die; all that is mine will change; and, I’m the owner of my action and the heir to my action; I live supported by my actions, etc. The preciousness of life, the fragility, the reality of change, and you are not a victim. The law of karma means you’re not a victim! It is not all preordained. Buddhism is not a fatalistic path. The first discourse in Majimanikaya, the Buddha says it goes too far to say that everything that happens is the result of your action. [But] it goes too far to say that nothing is the result of your action. But your attitude, cettana ... the Buddha said that it is cettana that harasses this world out there and in this body and mind – it has primacy. In a sense, you work with cettana and it is like attitudinal healing.
Cettana means will, volition, intention but I think it also means attitude. Buddhist psychology is a dynamic psychology. What does that mean? It means that a racist wakes up in the morning and they don’t have to think they’re a racist. That coming together of thought, that complex of attitudes is self-sustaining. That nexus of attitude, once you give it its power, it keeps rolling. But you can also change that with view – that’s why Right View is [important] – and you can insert a stop in the chain. You can go from the wheel of birth and death to the spiral of transformation, the dependent origination of liberation. It’s just one little sutra in Theravada. So, insert a stop, use yonisomanasika, wise perception. ‘Yoni – womb, matrix,’ a new matrix of understanding, and you choose a new action that is hopefully more reality-true than the other way of what you were living. So I say to people, “Well, that implies that we know what reality is.” Well, if you understand this then you realise that the Eightfold Path, the five precepts are actually reality statements. The brahmaviharas are reality statements. The Buddha is saying, in effect, that these qualities, the brahmaviharas, the five precepts, are a definition of what reality is like. The five precepts ... is [being] kind, is [being] truthful, is [being] content. The one about sexual misconduct that never meant just sex but meant sense things, and so the positive definition of that is to practice contentment. So we choose another strategy. We actually decide: “What am I going to do instead of that? I’ve done this action 50 times before or 1000 times before and it always comes out the same way, and I think I’ll just do it one more time.

Interviewer: What do you say to that?

Isaac: Pphhm! Useless! The literal meaning of the word samsara is to go around and around in circles. So we then come up with experiments, like Andy said, “My experiment with truth.”

Interviewer: I get the idea but can you illustrate with a few examples of, say, yourself of that change you’re trying to get and one of the people you know.

Isaac: It’s always more difficult with oneself. I’ll start of with a student – a very simple thing. Using metta, or kindness to oneself, to break a vicious cycle. So two people would ring her: her mother and a person who she was helping who was an ex-drug addict. Both of those people were quite devastating to her. So mother was very critical and attacking. The other person manipulated her. And she’d come in to the group and say things ... she was having a conflict with somebody. OK then, try this, try this. So I just said to her “Well, technically what is happening is that they start, you regress. And your awareness is gone. You’re lost.” So I got her to write on her telephone receiver ‘May I be well and happy’ and again above the wall ‘May I be well and happy’. She’d been doing some practice as well. So every time she picked up the phone and it was one of those people on it, the deal was she had to immediately recite ‘May I be well and happy’. And she was absolutely astounded at the transformation that occurred for her, that she didn’t get affected by the conversations. She could listen to her mother and be compassionate but not get hooked by the nastiness. What she was doing was not picking up the other end of the pattern. The mother and the
ex-addict were caught up in a negative cycle, and if she’d picked up the other end of the pattern she’d become a victim of them. That’s self-perpetuating. But she could be there and not pick up the other end of the pattern. So very simple things.

Interviewer: So she would recite before and the idea of that is?

Isaac: To remind her to be kind to herself. In this sense metta means friendliness ... to be a friend to yourself, to be kind to yourself. The greatest kindness is not to abandon somebody and what she was doing was abandoning herself ... When she got caught she, as it were, regressed. Sati is not there. Clear comprehension is not there. So metta is a path ... because she’d practiced a bit of metta meditation with me ... just ‘pphhmm’ ... just insert that. So what technically she was doing is inserting a stop where the feeling starts to arise up and choosing a new pattern. A pattern of compassion for herself.

Interview: So that was a technique for creating sati and mindfulness?

Isaac: Mindfulness and ... through kindness for herself. So combines both. Combines the affect with the other thing too.

Interviewer: And for yourself?

Isaac: A lot of it is ingrained now. In the biggest sense ... I’ll go for a big thing. When I was 18 with Khantipalo doing meditation retreats up here, doing metta meditation, I entered into jana states with that. So metta practice has been something that is interesting to me. I haven’t done a lot of deep intensive practices but ... what it does is help to build a sort of fearlessness in one and an ability to think better, I think. So you’re not afraid. What stops most people thinking is actually fear. They go into a tract and stop, stop, stop. So I started running these groups for violent men. This is 15 years ago. And I reflected on it afterwards, “Now what made it possible for me to deal with these people?” Sometimes people were threatening you etc., etc. Really what it got down to was metta practice. When you are faced with a life and death thing, your mind reverts to what a heavy experience is. What it goes down to in my life, in my conscious practice ... that’s one of the heavy experiences: metta, samadhi, jana and other samadhi type states. So even if I was not doing a lot of formal practice, that’s there is like a benchmark ... a benchmark. And it’s sort of an unshakeable foundation. Often the surface level of your mind you get involved with all sorts of rubbish etc., but when you come to a position that you’ve got to really be there, what is your default position? My default position is: ‘I’m OK. I’m OK.’

Interviewer: That’s very important because a lot of people do not have that.

Isaac: And it’s not I’m OK in the blah, blah in the I’m OK, you’re OK sort of thing. It’s like ‘Pphhmm!’ And I can think, I can feel and I’m not afraid ... It’s like self-reliance at a deep level ... to get it done, to deal with this difficult situation. So I’m not saying that I don’t get stressed etc., etc., etc., but really that’s when one get
caught up in the surface level of things. But it is like ‘Pphhmm!’ the default position is ‘I'm OK’.

Interviewer: Are you saying that a big contributing factor was the *metta* meditation you did?

Isaac: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you practice *metta* meditation?

Isaac: In those particular ones they’re very formal metta meditation like in the Visuthimagga starting off with oneself and then going out to people, and my personality go very easily for formless states. I can stay with space elements – I have a lot of energy and so I’m able to stay with spaciousness easily. Spaciousness as in the formless realms. There is a link-in to my other practice of being able to be with the space elements: earth, air, water, fire, space and consciousness. So just to be with spaciousness.

Interviewer: Is spaciousness the same as emptiness?

Isaac: Well the Tibetan tradition would say that it’s the closest metaphor one has to the understanding of *suunyata*. But, no, it’s not the same ... but it’s very close. So it’s just spaciousness. So those two things come together for the *metta*: fearlessness and a sense of internal spaciousness. As I said, I can get stressed out and blah, blah, blah but in a crisis, I default to that: spaciousness and fearlessness which comes from *metta* or loving-kindness.

Interviewer: How do you develop the *jana* states?

Isaac: When I used to practice in the early days through breath meditation and things like that ... that, in a sense, I can just practice and just, as it were, just sit and be present. I was talking to Santidham once about it and he said in the Mahasi [Sayadaw] tradition it is like, yes, you’re doing all your noting, this, that and the other, but you are also being alert to the gaps - the gaps in the regular thinking. Through that gap you enter into natural awareness or the natural state of mind or whatever you want to call it. So it’s not really ... I sort of make a distinguishing between what the Buddha is talking about ... in the Forest Tradition you can either go, what I call *jana* or *samadhi* ... it’s like insight practice. It’s presence with awareness with whatever is, whatever’s there. So I suppose in the Tibetan tradition it’s like *enso chen* – you just sit in natural awareness, or something like that. So I’m not clear at all in some of the other technical distinction.

Interviewer: In your meditative practice, were there any special moments that made a real impact?
Isaac: There were lots of different things because my mind tends to that sort of spaciousness thing, experiences. There are a few of them. Going back 30 years with Khantipalo in those retreats, one time in doing breath meditation ... it’s like the citta [mind] just goes ‘Pphhmm!’ [sudden downward sound] – dropped! It felt like my awareness went from here and just dropped. My body went like stone ... solid, and then this visionary experience started happening. And my consciousness, it’s like, was travelling down these corridors, valleys, ravines and travelling, travelling, travelling. Then there’s a scene and a person that I identify with and that was me. And he’s wearing sort of robe clothing – middle-eastern or something. And then I’m looking out through the eyes of this being and there are swords coming down; I was about to be killed ... and then I withdrew ... I didn’t have the presence of mind to stay with it. So I took that to be, OK, there are previous lives and there are previous deaths. Nobody talks about that [laughs]! That gave me a sense of ... well, there’s a hell of a lot going on ... at one level. Just by watching the breath, everything will happen. You don’t have to do a whole lot of technique. If you can just stick with the technique there is a natural unfolding that happens. But you need guidance otherwise, like me in that first experience, fear came and I withdrew. A couple of weeks later I did the jana thing with metta. Then I had a good experience many years ... I’m not doing it in any order now; I’m just thinking of critical moments. I had been working as a counsellor for many years. I hadn’t done a lot of intensive meditation practice for a long time. So I went and did a retreat with Duravamsa who was a Thai and had been a monk for many years ... I did a 10-day retreat with him. Two things happened there. Again what I found was I was able to drop into deep meditation quite easily and I realise that working with people counselling, in order to do that, you have to be sort of transparent to yourself. You can’t hide your faults from yourself. You’re dealing with somebody who’s violent, sexually abusive or somebody who’s been violated or whatever. This stirs up things in yourself. And you have to look at this: “I too have the same capacities; I too could do that.” Don’t pretend that you can’t. So too many people moralise, “I would never do that.” What one needs to do is say: “I’m a human being with a mind and a body; I could do any of this.” If you own up to that you’re less likely to. You have to face the reality of the human shadow: the potential for destruction or good in us. So in a sense counselling people over many years ... in the way I was doing it I put ... when they were telling me their stories ... sensing myself in the experience with them and feeling what they’re feeling. Otherwise you miss what’s important. So it’s sort of like ... I used to call it ... psychic drain over you, clean the drain in your psyche ... you have to be very honest with yourself. So I found I was dropping into meditation very easily ... quickly, even though I hadn’t done a lot of practice. I sat for many hours in one session. And I’ve had it before where effort becomes vitality: you know, the moment before you’re like this [indicates being drained of energy] and then ‘Pphhmm!’ the whole body is full of energy and no pain and all that sort of thing. But this one was very interesting. He [the teacher] had this interesting little word he said about when something happens, don’t interfere with it, just say to yourself ‘allow process’. It’s just what teachers call a meditation experience. So I saw this bright light type of thing. My consciousness went over to it and it looked like a palm tree. It’s like my citta went over to it ... and when it hit, it was like an explosion of light. What seemed like a palm tree was actually
this channel of energy pouring out. As my consciousness went into that there was an explosion of light. I realise what it was the central energy channel and the two other energy channel in the body. Of course, all the pain dropped out of the body and, keeping with my practice, and this thing was just unfolding – not getting involved with it, it’s just happening. And then I had this ... I’ve had this thing happening with energy being held in the stomach and it was like energy was coming up the body – lights, this, that and the other, energy release – and then right at the end it was like cool breeze coming on my back. I talked to an acupuncturist and they’re called the wind points in the back there. OK I realise that with breath meditation if you are diligent with it, withdrawing the mind from all its distractions, when a certain amount of unification of mind happens, complete natural and spontaneous healing process starts happening in body/mind, realigning itself and things like that. That was a very ... I had understood that at an intellectual level because I had had experiences, but I really got it then: that if people can just get out of the way with their intellectualisation and just be with what is ... no matter how they do it, whatever the technique, it doesn’t matter ... if you can just be present, the body/mind responds. The Visuthimagga means the path to purifications and so all those natural levels of purifications just start happening.

Interviewer: What does it do to your life then?

Isaac: It strengthens confidence in Buddhism and in oneself. In myself, or my not-self, that I can practice and attain the Path, all of it. You just have to do the practice.

Interviewer: You said your ‘not-self’. What lead you to say that and are there any experiences of your ‘not-self’?

Isaac: Well another experiment with mindfulness. After I started running these groups for violent men, a few years later the head of the Marriage Guidance Council started doing some as well. We were in contact and I was up in Maine and arranged to meet him. And we were having a conversation like peers and I asked him, “How did you come to do this?” and he heard it as something like, “What’s your qualifications?” He answered differently because he didn’t hear what I’d said and started saying his qualifications and he had a big, long list of qualifications. And then he said, “What’s your background?” I’ve got no qualification, so I have to just start saying the things that I’ve done. And as I started to speak, I started to burn! I started to burn ... red ... embarrassment – my inferiority complex. But I knew what was happening. I had sati. So I chose not to suppress the burning ... to allow process. So I continued to talk with him while I burned. We talked for another 20-30 minutes and I let it go. I let it burn. Then I got in the car and drove away and I let it burn. And it didn’t pass for another half an hour. I haven’t had much of a problem with that since, with inferiority complex. The spiritual practice is called atapas: heat. You’re burning the defilement. So this is an ordinary world version of it. Jung said also that the cure for a complex is awareness. So the complex makes itself known through identity; that means you and it are the same thing. It’s not a choice - I identify. And repetition happens
again and again and again. So fortunately the complex emerged, my inferiority complex, and I just let it be there with awareness. Now, if it happens, I’d say to the person, “Isn’t this interesting! I’m burning!’ [great laughter].”

Interviewer: So this is an example of not-self.

Isaac: Yes, not-self ... don’t take it personally. This is just a complex. If you’re going to have a self, you’re going to have all these distortions and problems with it. And if you take it personally you will never heal. That is what stops most people from change is fear of death. In therapy, people will hold on to their vision of self even if that one is a tragically abused self.

Interviewer: Really? Why?

Isaac: Because that’s who they are.

Interviewer: They’re afraid of death? What do you mean?

Isaac: In order for initiation to occur ... change, learning ... subsets of that type of transformation, of initiation ... death and rebirth ... so you have to die to free yourself of the previous notion of yourself in order to have a transformation of consciousness.

Interviewer: Ah, so you don’t mean physical death?

Isaac: No, no ... but if you hold on to it, it will kill you ... spiritually or emotionally. Jung said that there is no development without sacrifice. So we have to sacrifice a limited version of who we think we are for another version. So that’s what stops change is fear of death, I think ... loss of identity. Even if that identity is extremely negative and destructive, it is still that person’s identity. So you have to help them come into a bigger vision of themselves, of what’s possible ... Right View, integral vision. And then they can let that one go. If there is nothing for them to move to, how are they going to change? This is not ultimate enlightenment. It’s making a new vision that is hopefully more reality true. Until you get to the place of no pattern. It is a basic principle in Abhidhamma that you don’t get rid of an old pattern unless you have a new pattern to take its place. Hopefully the new one is more reality true until you get to the place of no pattern, [which is] arahantship. But on the way there you need patterns: precepts, the Path – they’re more reality true patterns. So the thing with it is that ... when one of the factors of awakening is present in consciousness, the condition is there for all of them to be there. So if you can arouse one of those wholesome states in person through memory, through discussion or whatever, the radiant ... their natural intelligence comes out. If one aspect is there all the conditions are there for everything to come in. Just needs one doorway. There’s a term in Pali ... the first job of insight is to pull one thread out of the tangled mass. Doesn’t matter which one it is because they’re all connected. So therapeutically, if you can get a person to stop ‘worshipping at an altar of pain’ I call it – pain has great authority, my identity if here – then there is all these possible identities. See identity is a mechanical
term really. In Latin, it is *adieum et adieum* [which means] ‘again and yet again’ or ‘again and again’. *Personality* comes from *persona* - a mask. So in the wisdom of the language there’re a lot of things there. *Embarrassment* comes from the old word Italian *embre*, to imprison behind bars. So embarrassment is the type of fear that you have when you step outside of the prison of a too rigid definition of who you are. You step out and up comes the fear. That’s embarrassment but it is a clue: “Hey, I’m identified here. Is this beneficial or is it a prison?” So the two protectors of the world, conscience and decorum, most people what they think is their conscience is merely decorum: following peer pressure, following the rules of the society, the family etc. It takes a long time to give birth to a real self, and then you’ve got to let go of it [laughs]!

**Interviewer:** Part of identity nowadays is about consumption: you are what you consume. Do you think that your way of thinking or practice can help things like this?

**Isaac:** Yes, I do. Because as I said the word ‘identity’ ... there’s a whole thing call identity politics and they dressed it up as a wholesome thing and I understand what they’re talking about ... but ultimately it is the mechanistic mind. And the forces of consumerism know this very well. So what is advertising? Advertising is repeat – again and again and again - building up the identities of want and lack. Spirit in a bottle – they are all selling enlightenment is what it is. Drugs of addiction are dressed up like that. I said before that in true initiatory practice, you have letting go ...

**Interviewer:** What is initiatory practice?

**Isaac:** *Initiation* means the start of something but it means here transformative process. This is a Jungian idea but it is in traditional cultures. It’s in baptism in the West: you get drown and born again into the church. The Buddha cut his hair off and he died to his old life and he was born again ... transforming. So it is the symbol of initiation, of starting something. Drugs of addiction ... the last precept: I undertake the rule of training to abstain from refined and distilled substances which confuse the mind. I think, in these days, it is not just pharmaceutical drugs and alcohol. Gold can be considered refined and distilled substances. Carbon – we live in a carbon age e.g. petrol, cheap energy. These are all refined and distilled substances and they confuse the mind into thinking that you are a god, that you are immortal and you are in control. So I say to my students: “When you are practicing meditation, let go of control. Just be with - your mind wants to think thoughts, let it think thoughts, don’t control, come back to attention and just let the mind think. Will come back to awareness.” DROPS: Don’t Resist Or Push, Soften. Don’t Resist means don’t barricade yourself against life and thoughts and whatever - OK let it be. Don’t Push means don’t suppress. Just be with it. Soften, soften, soften. See vipassana is more feminine. In Western practice, *samadhi* or concentration is logos – goes from a large to a small. Awareness goes from a small to a large. It’s not logos-based. The feminine consciousness is a radical receptivity and that’s hard for the Western mind to get a handle on. So many Western academic over the years see the Buddha as a 1930’s English
philosopher in ginger tweed. They think you can intellectualise yourself out of samsara. It is an affront to say, ‘Let go of control.’ You’re not totally but you’re just being with what is. You’re letting go of the fantasy of control.

Interviewer: And is it hard for most Westerners from your experience?

Isaac: Yes, extremely hard.

Interviewer: But it did not seem to be hard for you.

Isaac: No. Well, if you take the doctrine of rebirth ... OK, well, it’s just the developmental stage ... I’ve done the work somewhere [laughs].

Interviewer: Perhaps not having those formal qualifications helped as well.

Isaac: I was astounded by ... Abby was starting another degree and she got a paper back and she had some marks taken off because she dared to surmised something ... having an original thought ... she didn’t have a PhD. Looking at the 5 precepts in the current age. Unless we take a structural approach, in a sense, it is impossible to keep them.

Interviewer: Can you relate the structure to your own practice of them?

Isaac: When I say a structural understanding, I mean international, global, economic, this, that and the other. If we take the essence of the five precepts at an ethical level: the non-oppression of oneself and others, non-exploitation of oneself and others.

Interviewer: How do you practice that?

Isaac: For me it means that ... Rabbi Hillel the Elder said these three things 2,000 years ago: ‘If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am for myself only, what am I? If not now, when?’ So I relate this to the question of structure and the five precepts. I can’t pretend that I’m independent of the world and the global economic structure. If I am merely a moralist ... in my personal life I have purity of sila, that may work for some but it doesn’t work for me. I have an obligation to look at the larger world and see that the fifth precept - refined and distilled substances confusing the mind including uranium, plutonium, weapons of mass destruction, gold, petrol and all of these things – I have to look at consumption of that. The first precept of no killing: if I don’t ... well I’m a lay person so have to deal with the insects, etc. but you get just get caught up in that level of it and not see that by living in the so-called Western world is at the expense of the lives of many others in other countries. Otherwise, you’re lying to yourself.

Interviewer: For the first precept, are you saying that you try to practice at both levels? But are there any tensions?
Isaac: Ah yes I’m compromised at both levels. And it would be childishly deny it. I go and have medicine that kills bugs in me. I live in a house and vermin can infest it. I kill them.

Interviewer: Do you have a problem with that?

Isaac: I don’t deny what I’m doing. So I don’t pretend to myself that it doesn’t matter. I don’t rationalise it in other words. I acknowledge I’m killing, that I’m making this choice and I’m making it. A lot of people rationalise it away; I don’t rationalise it away. So OK I’m doing this.

Interviewer: Do you try to minimise it?

Isaac: Minimise it, yes. How do you make it less interesting for them to breed, and this, that and the other. So minimise harm. So I suppose the best I can do is harm minimisation. I eat less meat and all that sort of thing. I do eat meat but I eat less, etc. At the structural level, it’s ... being involved in refugee issues, for instance, supporting refugees ... involved with refugees and social justice issues. To me that is linked to the first precept. If I live this life, it’s on the back of ... I can go into town and buy a cheap shirt and it’s on the back of some Chinese peasants - those sorts of things. I’ve still got it but we need to at least have it in consciousness. This is the first step. Then you start looking at what do I do that lessens these things. Consequently, you may need to think at the socio-political level and things like that.

Interviewer: That consciousness seems to parallel sati or mindfulness. While you can’t control e.g. anger you can be aware of it; while you can’t control exploitation in China you can be aware of it.

Isaac: Aware of it is a start, and make choices and minimise things where I can. Realise that involvement where you can in social issues, for me, is a religious duty really. It is a version of attacharya, beneficial action for all.

Part 2 (12 April 05) – After coffee break

Interviewer: I sense that you are trying very hard on different levels to applying the precepts, and that you acknowledge that there are failings, if you can call them that. What about the other precepts, e.g. false speech, are they easier to keep?

Isaac: At one level, yes, but, at another level, I think knowing things and not speaking about them is just as much a lie. So complicity and denial in a culture when we don’t speak out at a structural level, even at a community level, for example, don’t say things that rock the boat at local community. So I will be outspoken at times and it may not be very popular sometimes. But to me that is part of Right Speech; you have to tell the truth. I don’t mean in a way that is attacking or whatever because that then becomes wrong speech even if it is the truth. So I’d look at the meanings of the word and what the sila is. What is it? It
means having a reliable, subjective basis for action. It is an internal quality close to conscience, I suppose. I think the Thai word is karom which means ‘that which directs your outward flowing energy’. So like it’s getting yourself aligned. So your purpose is in alignment with your attitude and your vision of this. And so if you have a larger view … one of the bane of being … not everybody is intelligent – it’s not putting people down but some people are less intelligent than others. They have simple understanding and that’s fine for them. But if you are blessed and cursed with a bit of intellect, you are obliged to stop telling lies to yourself and not be complicit in the lies of the culture and political structures. If you can see that and understand that, you need to do something about it. Other people who don’t know it and see it or whatever … either through less intelligence or denial, avijja – refusal to see, OK that’s up to them.

Interviewer: So you think that people in the position that know it, for your interpretation of that precept, need to speak out.

Isaac: Otherwise you’re helping the whole of humanity to be killed. What are we looking at with carbon? How many people killed just from turbulent storm? If we don’t spread and we know these things we’re complicit. You prattle on about not hurting an insect and then 60% of the species is lost in Australia and billions of people killed. People living a good life by themselves, that’s fine. And I applaud it. And people with simpler understanding, that’s fine. They’re not bad and I’m not here to look down on them either.

**Part 1 (13 April 05)**

Interviewer: I think we’re finishing on false speech but I wanted to get your interpretations and application of the other precepts and how they influence behaviour.

Isaac: Well, the focus on speech … I think it was Sangharakshita observed: one can choose to meditate or not but you can’t choose not to communicate even the choice not to speak is a communication. So the perfection of speech requires some consideration because that’s how we know ourselves with our internal speech and how others know us in the world and how we make known in the world. So it’s got an internal and external element to it for me. So false speech internally is getting caught in negative self-talk to use psychological jargon. For many Westerners – I don’t know how it is with Thais - that’s the first obstacle they have to deal with. Self-criticism and attacking and talking to oneself the way you would never tolerate anyone else talking to you. Of course, that spills out into the world.

Interviewer: So in your experience have you found that patients who have come to you are self-critical talking inside about themselves?

Isaac: Yes, toxic talk about themselves. And cruel, harsh, demeaning, humiliating speech to yourself: “You stupid, f***** idiot.” They’d make a little mistake and go off attacking themselves. So authority issues or …
Interviewer: Is it common?

Isaac: Yes. Where there’s been abuse it is even more common but abuse is pretty rampant now ... physical, sexual and emotional. And now with the increasing corporatisation of everyday life .... both parents out of the home, kids are left to themselves and there are all these other voices that come in. They muck up ... the kids mess up and they get attacked and then they talk to themselves like that. Or they take the other role and talk extremely abusively in their head and it’s continual role warm-up to hostility, aggression, disrespect and all of that. They’re not respected, so they don’t respect. We don’t pay enough attention to this. So then false speech is this internal dialogue as well. Because if you are talking to yourself or you’re fighting World War 3 in your head it’s going to spill out. So you have to put an edit through that and learn how to speak to ourselves more kindly.

Interviewer: How do you do that?

Isaac: Just catching myself. Being aware that this is not useful. Even if I make a mistake, saying to myself “Stupid!” ... Why? Why would one talk to oneself in that tone of voice? It’s an interject. We’ve taken onboard authority messages around us and masquerade as ourselves. That voice talking in our head is carrying authority. And we don’t have to be oppressed outside; we do it to ourselves as well. And this is very important in terms of conscience at a larger level in society. Most people confuse, as I said, decorum, the social rules, moral dread ... it means fear of consequences: you don’t do something because you’re afraid authority is going to whack you. Most people confuse those messages in their head for true conscience. So that messages in their head has this authoritarian ring to it. So it is important to start disentangling that and it is the first step in saying, ‘Who says?’ ... that questioning, the real questioning. Who says that this is so and thus and true, etc.? One needs to take all the pious maxims ... in traditional cultures all sorts of garbage gets piled on ... you know Buddhist countries, all this cultural stuff ... oh, this is Buddhism, this is Buddhism. ‘Who says?’ is the question we have to start asking.

Interviewer: You hinted that you had that self-talk?

Isaac: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you deal with self-talk personally?

Isaac: Through vigilance with it. It is a cultural trait and I am a product of my culture. Neurosis is a failed attempt on the part of the individual to solve a problem that exists in the whole society as that problem manifests in your own life. So the whole Western culture is terminally confused with all these questions of authority and power, etc. Americans, for instance, trampling roughshod over the world at a political level, and individually poor self-esteem! Complete bizarre stuff going on here! It is a critical problem in the West. I think it goes back to in
Western theology, Western habits of thinking, where in the Middle Ages the Greek modes of logic were being rediscovered and used to support dogma. So there were many modes of arguments. But one of the ones that was seized upon and developed the most was negative critical thinking. Why? Because you need to be extremely skilled if you have a central dogma to refute everything else. And this has gone into the Western psyche: the habit of negative critical thinking. It is very good at refutation; it has its place. You know the Buddha used it too but he used many other things as well. And this is a central neurosis of Western culture which leads to grandiose swings: oppression inside and then overcompensates. Grandiose visions of power and all of this nonsense. So in my own life, it can be simple things. I remember telling my students one day when we’re talking about this. OK, I was out shopping at Woolworths. I came back to the car park and I’d forgotten to get something, and I caught myself saying, “You stupid idiot!” So what, one person might say? And then I’d say: “Why would I use those words? Why would anybody use those words in that tone of voice simply because there was a mistake?” I’m operating out of shame and blame thinking rather than responsibility thinking. So shame and blame thinking is: I blame you to stir up shame in you so that, quote, you self-correct to my idea of what’s right. Pphhmm! Hung on an authoritarian façade. But responsibility thinking says, “Yes, I am responsible for my actions but it is not necessary to be motivated by shame and humiliation, degradation.” It is ridiculous. Ridiculous state of affairs! In our child rearing practices, a little child knocks something over ... and, “You bad boy.” It’s not a bad boy, just someone who hasn’t got fine motor skills yet and made a mistake. So how do we correct and guide rather than inculcating shame and blame which then, in terms of the two protectors of the world, that type of shame is confused with moral conscience. That feeling of embarrassment that you might feel, as in the Abhidhamma, if the person you most respect in the world see what you were doing. So it is like an internal ‘Uh!’. But it is conflated with this external following the rules business that is inculcated by power over.

Interviewer: And with that example of Woolworths, how did you deal with it?

Isaac: Right there I said ... I just stopped and I talked with myself: “This is patently ridiculous to talk to myself like that! I made a mistake. That’s all that’s happened.” Obviously, I’ve been reflecting over the years on these issues a lot. So I just self-corrected. Instead of the language of an out-of-control parent, I used the language of a kind and guiding parent to myself. See now, in our culture, such things are value-judged as being indulgent ... where kids get indulged. Currently, because of this problem of moralising ... when people moralise they don’t think, it’s just the word ‘should’ comes in; that means you’ve stopped thinking.

Interviewer: Does Buddhist meditation have anything to do with dealing with that or is it your psychotherapy experience?

Isaac: It is a conflation of the two. The invaluable contribution of Buddhism is the training in attention and clear comprehension, sati sampajana. Without that you can’t apply any of the techniques that are in the world. Without sati sampajana all
the good ideas in the world are useless. And really Buddhism is the only tradition that talks about this.

Interviewer: Can you explain that? Explain why that is so?

Isaac: OK. *Sati* in ordinary conversational language means memory. So we can say that in meditation practice and in awareness in life, it is remembering to not forget, remembering to not forget to be present ... to be present with this moment – which doesn’t exist [laughs] – or remembering to be present with a particular course of action that you’ve decided upon. In a sense, *sati* just knows that and *sampajana* [clear comprehension] knows what it is [that you’re doing]. So we need both of those and I suppose the two of those together – they usually appear as a compound anyway – in the West is what we call awareness. But we don’t have the direct training method in the West. But OK these are important, so let’s do this to strengthen this, to strengthen this quality. It’s not awakening but it is training in mindfulness, training in attention.

Interviewer: You said ‘critical awareness’. Does that mean critical awareness of walking out of Woolworths and being aware clearly that you were being nasty to yourself?

Isaac: Yes, that’s right. And if there’s a cyclical psychodrama like that going on here, between a victim and a persecutor here, sooner or later that will spill out on to somebody else in the world. And I’ll go from being the victim here to being the persecutor of somebody else. Out come out the harsh things.

Interviewer: Have you done that?

Isaac: Of course. Out comes the little toads hop out of your mouth [laughs]. My wife would know about that, yes. In marriage, what happens is ... a certain degree of safety happens, and then we act in ways which we wouldn’t act with anybody else. The defences go down and then our regressed parts can come out. Very easy, you know. So when we’re outside some of that decorum help keeps us in line. But when that’s not there, if we haven’t really developed *hiri* or conscience, then it is open slather. So I’m a work in progress. And until full awakening, you can be a stream-enterer and still be a bastard ... because you’ve still got self-delusion, self and other, it doesn’t mean you’re a nice person [laughs]. So until full awakening we’re works in progress and we must do what the Buddha continued all his life: *Mirra*, I see you! *Mirra*, I see you!

Interviewer: Your wife also said in the kitchen that you had a short fuse and you were continually working on it. Is that so?

Isaac: Yes. It’s a mixture of my social background. So ‘pphmmm’ it all comes out, but it goes away pretty quickly too. I come from peasant class and my wife comes from upper class, owning class. Her father is a hereditary chieftain for God’s sake! New Britain squatters. They’re more about social control and politeness, etc., etc. My social background is a bit rougher and so it explodes out.
On top of that, I have a lot of energy and I’m a passionate person, artist whatever.

Interviewer: How do you deal with that, the explosions?

Isaac: Catches it as soon as I can. Patience is the greatest austerity. ‘The bloody Buddha said ...’ [in strong jest voice]. It’s difficult. And I have a quick mind as well. That can be a cause of great frustration for me. I can see what’s going on in situations and people just don’t understand, won’t get, think I’m an idiot talking about certain things. In the fullness of time it comes to past but that can be enormously frustrating ... in social circumstances, living in communities in the past. So I have a lot to work with [laughs]. So the best thing for me ... I said to a student the other day, sitting on the cushion in front ... I said, “It’s dangerous to sit out here.” It is all too easy to pretend what I’m not, to be what I’m not. Yes, I am intelligent; I’ve done a bit of everything; I could play most people like a violin if I wanted to. It’s like guru bullshit. You see things happen and you say something and four people think you’re talking directly to them. It’s so easy and I’ve seen charlatan do this and then they sort of look knowing and ... But for myself internally, you get seduced by all of that: pseudo power and all of that. So try and be ordinary. That confuses people too. Being ordinary, they expect you to be a particular way and thus. It is very easy to take on the external trappings of holiness. By act of will, I could suppress mightily and be very sweet because that is also in my nature. Sweetness and loving-kindness and friendliness, of course that is part of who I am as well as this other stuff. I could suppress the other. That wouldn’t be ... that would be false speech, merely suppression and not the removal of the obstacle of what belongs to hate.

Interviewer: Are you saying that you are not suppressing things like anger? Is that what you’re saying?

Isaac: If I wish to ... you could take it on as a thing ... you know, “I’m going to do this” ... it’s like [grunt] an act of will. And you see plenty of spiritual practitioners who do that and they’re gently simmering volcanoes ... because it is not authentic. There’s no insight. It’s merely suppression.

Interviewer: Is that suppression, you’re saying, to look holy?

Isaac: Yes, yes. It’s a power game. Power game. I avoid things that might go that way. We can be humourous and say sometimes you can’t help it because we’re all ... you know, extraordinary things pop out of my mouth, conversation, etc. etc. There’s something really good there but that’s not a façade. So where it becomes false speech is when I capitalise on that, capitalise on momentary insight. This is ridiculous. I am not fully in the stream. Something bubbles up from the stream but that’s just momentary insight. I’m not fully established in those things. So I’m not a great practitioner. I’ve had the path of being actively engaged in the world and do a lot. The Buddha would probably say, “You’re doing too much.” But we live in interesting and difficult times. Yes, I know if I pay more attention, there’d be more benefits because I’ve had the benefits in the past and continue to get them in
little ways. What I’m saying is as a role of being something – no! Of course, one holds back ... up comes an awareness of an unuseful emotion and I could choose to go with that and be abusive. But of course I don’t call that suppression, I call that being aware and choosing to do something else. But with suppression one is deifying a mask of who one is. I try not to do that.

Interviewer: It looks like the precept of false speech you take it at different levels. You take it to more subtle levels e.g. of power. To me that is a lesson for men of power, they could learn from. You’re letting go of power and not letting power consume you. Would you say that is accurate?

Isaac: Yes, that’s accurate. I’m not without influence but comparatively it is very minor. There are many hundreds of people who know who I am and that’s more than most people, but it’s not that level of influence. So in essence, what is Right Speech about: truthfulness. So we have to look at the heart of it and so the first manifestation and other things that Buddha said. If we work with those behaviours, that’s very good. But if we haven’t got deeper practice behind us, it stays pretty superficial. We’re just nice people who politely don’t interfere ... while the neighbourhood, while the country, while the world goes to hell and that’s not Right Speech. So there’re all these levels. But using the method of Right Speech, how do we speak out? If we simply ate the rhetoric of oppressors down the ages and try to shame people into it or whatever, is there another way to do this? There is this lovely thing: the Buddha is dead and Ananda [a key disciple] is leaning against the doorpost and weeping. Some people came and heard him and asked what happened. Ananda said: “He who was so kind is gone” not “The greatest master of transcendental wisdom ...” or this, that and the other. “He who was so kind is gone.” So can we recover or just use those other ways of speech to fearlessly say, “No.” But not get caught up in the model of power over etc, etc, etc. People with great presence do that. They just simply keep on telling the truth.

Interviewer: I think of the example of the Dalai Lama speaking the truth against the Chinese and yet putting it in such a kind and compassionate way.

Isaac: That’s right. So that’s the other thing. Amaravo is a vice-president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. And I said to him about indigenous issues and I was thinking, “Wouldn’t it be interesting if the World Fellowship of Buddhists had a secretariat for indigenous issues and indigenous Buddhists,” of which there are many. In the Chitagong hills in Bangladesh genocide has been going on for years with those tribal people who are Buddhists. And the tribal people in Tibet and in the Himalayas and in Burma and Shan and all of these. They’re copping it bad. But you have to be speaking out about some things, and he said, “It probably wouldn’t go down too well – very conservative body.” So I think, if he’s got an accurate take on things, “Well, what the hell is it for?”

Interviewer: Can I just get your take on the other precepts?
Isaac: Sexual misconduct. My understanding of that is sex is merely a code for sensual misconduct. It’s come to be just sexual misconduct and that’s as the Theravada got a little bit more rigid and monastic in the first, second and third councils after the Buddha was gone. Getting a bit rigid. It’s better to say sensual misconduct because otherwise we eat the world.

Interviewer: So what does that mean and apply to you?

Isaac: Addiction in all of its forms. We can be addicted to sex. Sex and the levels of sexual misconduct - that’s simply non-oppression, no sexual oppression, no exploitation of others for sexual pleasures. The obvious ones are rape and paedophilia and others. But if we just confine it to sex it is limited. It means to practice contentment. But the question is: “How much is enough?”

Interviewer: Has that been difficult or easy for you?

Isaac: How much is enough is the larger question. It gets down to materialism and consumerism. I have a background in antique trade and I see a lot of things. There’s a lot of stuff around my house. I see things at garage sales, etc. and get them very cheaply. So I like those things but there is this question of use of natural resources and things like that. I just got a book that came from America researching for the new monastery. Twenty odd years ago I developed a technique called sawdust cement construction here using waste sawdust as a building thing. It took off around here. So I’m researching using fibrous cement ... that’s basically paper ... waste paper chopped up in a giant blender with a bit of sand and concrete ... to make dwellings on this place. It’s like what can I ... I suppose, it’s the antique restorer in me: I take somebody else’s waste and turn it into something [laughs].

Interviewer: But getting back to a rather difficult concept, for you, how much is enough?

Isaac: It is linked to what I was saying: this current project. This house, it’s big, it’s recycled – I took an old house and brought it out here on a truck and fixed it up. So recycled the whole house. And with this monastery and, as soon as you say the word, a lot of people start to think of things with gold leaf everywhere and whatever. And so, no! No! What do we need to accomplish the purpose? Amavaro and I look at it like this: What is the minimum requirement? How can we make the best quality, cheapest kuti [monk dwelling] you can make? So I’m looking at this paper-crete. We can’t eat the earth. It’s like part of the practice to think like this. What’s the minimum requirement? I did a budget for this thing and, yes, it might take a million dollars but if somebody else was designing it, it would be millions of dollars. There’re wretched Buddhist wedding cakes around the place or $40 million temples in Woolongong. It’s just ridiculous! Absurd! We need to be engaging with the world, with the suffering. Get out of the fancy temple and set up a tent in the car park or shopping centre - that’s where the suffering is! The Buddha said there are these empty places, forests – go there and practice. And Buddhists want to run away into a fancy building! So yes, and in my own life
I’ve got all of this under the house. I’ve got all this stuff there but that will go into building the monastery ... things like that. I make things. I collect stuff and it will be pphhhmm. So ... apart from books ... it’s my big downfall. So it’s having that question there. Consumerist ethic is coming at us everywhere: more, more, more! The madness of progress.

Interviewer: With this issue of consumption, it seems that still there are some conflict and tension within you.

Isaac: Ah, yes, yes. I live in the world. I’m not a monk. I live in the world though I don’t have to work now: I’m in a privileged position. I have an income.

Interviewer: That’s a choice?

Isaac: Yeah, well ... and it’s a blessing through Abby’s inheritance ... inherited wealth. Our circumstances only recently changed in the last 5-6 years ... so that it makes it possible for me to do all of the things. So we have this income but it doesn’t mean we can kick back and hang out in Bali. We do activities, attachariya, that we need to do. It’s part of our dharma of our life, sanghavatthu ... what builds community. It’s not whether you’re in a robe or not; it’s like you’re covering the robe inside.

Interviewer: The last one is stealing.

Isaac: So for me, it is taking that which is not given. So it’s really hard there. At conventional level it’s not hard but living in our society as it’s constructed I have to acknowledge that my ... the standard of living that I enjoy ... we don’t have air conditioning and all that sort of stuff, but we’re comfortable. It’s like a deva realm compared to most places in the world. But it’s on the back of countless oppressed workers all over the world. I’m stealing their livelihood. We all are complicit in that. We are all stealing from the poorest of the poor everywhere. You know I work with aboriginal people and everything has been taken away. The people in Arnham Land I work with ... those Aboriginal people had a system of economics there and had been trading with Indonesia for hundreds of years ... and the value of that trade was extraordinary ... in the 1900’s when the Australian government of the time stopped the trade and made the Aboriginal economy collapse. The Aboriginal people were trading down into Queensland and into central Australia, and systematically chopped off. Their whole society collapses because you’ve got military incursion stopping all their trade everywhere. Then the land being stolen from them. That’s in Arnham Land but the same happened in the Kimberley, the centre and all down the eastern coast. We live on the blood of others. It’s stolen. It’s no good just saying, “That’s history.” Yes, I didn’t personally do it but I benefited from it. So I need to not be naive.

Interviewer: Would you rectify this if you could?
Isaac: Yes ... I do what I can in terms of what do the people want the most. And one of the things they want the most is to meet the other at the deepest level. To truly understand ...

Interviewer: The other as in white people?

Isaac: Yes. We want to share our knowledge. We've got knowledge. The West has knowledge and we want to learnt that and that ... the situation is much worse now than it was in the in 1930's. At least knowledge from the West was coming in. There were some very good missionaries working with Aboriginal people who let them keep their Aboriginal culture but shared and taught. So you have old people that are much better educated and articulate than their grandchildren. Successive governments have not been interested. So that is one level in this country that we steal ... I steal, in a structural sense. One can't get stupid about this. The question of clear thinking, of what alternative are there.

Interviewer: In your experience, why are Buddhists in the West more engaged than their Asian counterparts?

Isaac: The light side of the Western Enlightenment encourages thoughts about things and questioning. It's there in the Buddha's teachings but the various cultures it's been transmitted to aren't into that ... including the Thai culture. They say they're Buddhists ... but they're Thai ... and Buddhists. It's like the monarchy in Thailand ... the present royal family ... very laudable ... the King is a laudable person. But the structure of monarchy ... not so much now but in earlier times ... what's the power structure? It's brahminical. It's not Buddhist. You say, 'Buddhist, Buddhist' but there's all this caste business, caste system. And that is in the Sangha too. It was in the time of the Buddha as well. People came into the Sangha and they're not hacking it. They keep on this notion of caste and then they put it into the teaching. So we have a caste system in the West, in England, whatever. In Australia, it's been more level. It's like we say, “I'm as good as you.” It may not be true [laughs].

Part 2 (13 April 05) – After coffee break

Interviewer: You were saying that there are some positive elements from the Enlightenment.

Isaac: Yes, reason. But there is hubris in it, of course, as there are in any system. Conventional Buddhists – too much hubris. They think they know what the dharma is – same problem. So we have to see what are those elements there and, surprise for me, the best elements in the Enlightenment thing there it is the Buddha was talking about very similar notions. And there is this notion of democracy. And then there are scholars who say that Buddhists are democratic whereas the Sangha is not democratic. Because in the Sangha dissent is actually in the vinaya – dissent is allowed. In Western democracy, it's majority rules. In the vinaya – it's not how it's practiced of course ... it's authoritarian – but you're suppose to and the youngest member is suppose to vote. But it also
allows dissent. If there is a disagreement that can't be resolved then it's allowable for that group or individuals to set up another sangha. I don't mean the total Sangha but rather individual groupings. So Buddha was very crafty there, I think. Because most people are very good at what they're against. But when it comes to what you're for, they collapse. So then you have to go and do something. Often it will fall apart. So that's one side of it, but the other side of it is, OK ... who says the majority always knows what's best. And that's there and that's not Western democracy. That's indigenous values.

Interview: So you are saying that one of the positive elements of the Enlightenment is critical reasoning and that Westerners therefore look upon Buddhism with a more critical eye as oppose to Asians who tend to be less critical.

Isaac: Yes, and ... Buddhadasa made the same critique ... that we're calling all of these things dharma. It's not dharma! It's just culture. I do rituals and ceremonies and whatever but if people just keep on doing it and doing it and don't understand what it was for, it's meaningless. Another name for ritual is art. It is an artistic representation ... It's a way of making visible something that is internal and invisible. So we do that to show an internal attitude of respect. But if you just do that and you don't respect yourself, you can't respect anybody else. It's mere cringing. So it's coming from an emptiness. The word power comes from the Latin 'to be able.' So it means generativity or creativity and so it's a sense of ability in the person. And those who don't have that ... got an emptiness in them. So they go for power over others or power under others. And there's too much mere observation of respect in traditional cultures. So in Thai culture ... I remember a fella used to come and hang out with the Western monks. He said, “When I first met you Westerners I said, ‘Oh, these farangs so uncouth and coarse.' But over the years I realised that ... maybe not so bad. Thai people ... we're all this face business and we smile, smile at each other. Then you're walking down a dark alley and your friend sticks a knife in your kidney.” It's just suppression. So that's all status ... face, status and things like that ... and blind obedience is never any good. I was told a story in Thailand: some king ... his barge is going down the river and a retainer of his ... in order to save the king overtakes his barge and does something knowing that he's going to get put to death for overtaking the king's barge, but he does it anyway. And the king follows the rules and puts him to death even though the person was saving his life. It's just complete stupidity. The form ... and this is what the Buddha meant by clinging to rites and rituals. This is brahmanical nonsense! And purity notions - it's all Brahmanism. It's got nothing to do with Buddhadhamma. There are meditation teachers who are hung up on purity. This fella, Goenka ... he won't let ... he's a Brahmin. He's an Indian merchant class from Burma. I've never been to his retreat but Abby was and friends over the years, and he wouldn't let anyone who had meditated with somebody else be together because it would contaminate them. I heard this and I thought this is heresy. Nonsense. And he wouldn't let people ... hung up on cleanliness. So they're putting in a centre and it couldn't be a secondhand stove. It had to be pure. This is all Brahmanism ideas
and people think it's Buddhism ... it's just nonsense. Purity ... the external purity but nothing to do with the inside.

Interviewer: So what is your ultimate purpose in life?

Isaac: What I am doing. I think we know our purpose by seeing what it is we're doing. So I don't know of an ultimate purpose in one sense. So I look at ... people get caught by this and get lost: “Oh, I don't have a meaning in life.” But I say to them, “Look at what you're doing in your life. That's your life purpose.” If it doesn't suit you, well, fiddle around with it a bit but that's what it is. What I'm doing now. So if I extrapolate on it, what's my purpose? To be of service. To wake up in different ways. I look at and engage with different traditions because I'm suspicious of one-eye visions of what's the truth.

Interviewer: Do you engage with Buddhist and other indigenous traditions?

Isaac: Yes and other Buddhist traditions ... Theravada but there's Theravada that occurs in Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka and there're all different. And then Tibetan stuff, etc., etc. And in other indigenous traditions. So one of my purposes is to wake up to a fuller vision, you could say ... a more holistic vision of life, the universe and everything. So it is to attain what I think the Buddha means by Whole View, Right View. So, in a sense, teaching people I'm serving them, help them whatever. I'm not exclusive; I don't think I've got all the answers. I'll push them Amaravo's way or go there or something or other because I've got my limitations.

Interviewer: Does enlightenment have anything to do with purpose?

Isaac: Yes. Well ... I don't use the word enlightenment very much. I prefer bodhi (awakening) and nibbana (unbinding, cooling the fire of addiction and delusion). I sort of think that avijja is ignorance but it's sort of like a denial as well, refusal to see. So there is sort of a subtle choice in there, to let go of that, to cool down the fire of wanting, to see things as things rather than uncontrollable processes and interactions. So my purpose is ... well, yes it is awakening ... but I’m ... whether I ... and ... and not but ... and I seem to have a particular approach for this life.

Interviewer: And do you think that full awakening is attainable within a lifetime or what is your interpretation?

Isaac: Yes, I think so and I don’t agree with the scholastic interpretation that the gates to nibbana are closed. This is nonsense ... nonsense in the discourses where the Third Council or somebody, they got the Buddha can't make up his mind whether women should be ... because naughty Ananda has made me do this. Oh, that means that the dispensation is only going to last for 500 years or less. And it’s absolute partisan nonsense. You know, got his stepmother giving him a hard time. You just look at the historical record ... she didn’t become a nun until her husband died and there were already plenty of nuns. So it's nonsense that she came with a whole bunch of people and they were the first nuns and
you’ve got to accept these rules no matter how long you’ve been ordained, you’re like this to somebody who’s one day ordained. All of these are in there are despicable nonsense destroying the sasana [religion]. My path to awakening is to hold those paradoxes and see that there’s the practice tradition and then there’s all this socio-political nonsense that goes on. In all of that, there’s an essence there that’s eminently practical. And I know from personal experience that if you do the work, the fruit comes. And it is not an enormously long process; it needn’t be. If it’s excruciatingly long, find a better teacher! Really! Or be honest with yourself. And so if the teacher’s limited ... telling you just to ruin your body and endure pain for no good reason, well ... then that’s limited ... childish things. Do some exercises. Loosen up the joints ... whatever. Don’t destroy your knees and joints and all of this childish nonsense that goes on. So it’s looking at a ... for me, yes, it’s all possible.

Interviewer: You say nonsense ... you talked about nonsensical interpretations that are culturally bounded, misinterpretations, and so on but I detected in earlier conversation that, you had some admiration or you see some use for some of the hierarchical elements/cultural elements.

Isaac: Ah yes, yes ... there’s no ideal human society where there’s noble or ignoble all mixed up. The saving grace of humanity is our inconsistency. If we were consistent, we would have long ago exterminated ourselves. So in amongst all that stupidity, there are individual beacons of light. And it’s like it’s encoded in the language. It’s in ... people are saying one thing and they’re doing another and if what they’re doing is kind ... yeah, OK ... it’s fine, it’s good, it adds to the good. So ... and same with cultural traditions, OK. If people are happy then you don’t try and ... stomp on them. You just show them that there are other things and those other ones will fade away over time. So it’s like that. I’m a bit of an iconoclast but I know that one can be gentle about it. Internally, I can be iconoclastic but I can’t demand others. So when I talk like this with you, showing you a bit of the fire here ... but it’s simply stupid to do that with somebody who doesn’t ... to act from that position. It’s not going to work. And it’s not the way the dharma works. Buddhism goes like in Laos: all of the tribal totems come into the wats [temples] – just incorporated and all other sorts of things. As long as you don’t lose the essence of the practice tradition, it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter what people believe. King Mongkut ... there a lovely story of the missionaries wanting to come in. OK, Christian missionaries come and he’s recorded as saying to somebody: “Ah these Christians are doing very good things but what they believe is so strange!” [laughs]. So what it gets down to from the point of view of practice: it doesn’t matter what you believe. If you follow the instructions reality will unveil itself. You can go to a big teacher and go there believing in God and the teacher won’t ... the Buddha didn’t bother about that. The Brahmins came to see him and said, “We want to know god.” He replied, “OK, I’ll tell you how to know god. Practice these things and you will know god, Brahma. Practice loving-kindness. This is the path to Brahma. I know Brahma. I speak to him regularly.” That’s the Buddha’s way. So god is no problem. There’s no obstacle; it’s only belief. I believe I’m real. If my belief conditions my practice, then it would be hopeless. Hopeless! Nobody would get anywhere. But it doesn’t matter what you believe;
that’s only the intellect. If you do the practice, you see directly what’s happening. And it doesn’t matter that you believe something different. It doesn’t matter if you believe you’re going to get intoxicated; if I slip something into your drink you’re going to get intoxicated. Your ideas count for nothing. And the same with the practice. So we get and Westerners we really get hot under the collar about belief and not realising that it’s just part of our cultural nonsense. And we can’t see other cultures’ beliefs and get all negative and critical and whatever. It’s silly! We don’t have to do that. We can find a way to be friends. Kalayanamitas can exist there no matter what I believe and what you believe. If we’re willing to look for friendship we can find it because, ultimately, if you take the Buddha’s teaching seriously, those beliefs count for nothing. Because it is all empty.

Interviewer: Yes, it seems we’re all hung up, the whole civilisation.

Isaac: Yes, I’m right, you’re wrong.

Interviewer: So we just kill each other, for nothing.

Isaac: Nothing! Literally!

Interviewer: Lastly, what’s the meaning of happiness to you as the final question?

Isaac: Happiness is ... a state of being. It is felt in my body, mind as well-being. And it’s ... it’s ... for me, it’s ... at one level, it’s simply the absence of major pain and things like that and mental pain and anguish, whatever. So it has elements of tranquillity to it, but ... also an edge of delight ... so appreciation is ... happiness for me is linked to love and appreciation and a sense of wonder and gratitude. I’ve lived long enough to see that things break, and you get old and whatever. But I can still find delight in the things, know that they are impermanent and let them go. And being an antique dealer is good practice in that: I love these things and you’ve got it and then you pass it on [laughs]. And the more you like something the better you are at selling it. If you love the thing, you’ll sell it like that [click of fingers] because the person feels your delight in it. See when I was a woodworker, same thing: you do it and there’s love in it, whatever. One of my woodworker mates, he said, “We don’t ... we’re not selling bits of wood; we’re selling ourselves.” So the more you love something as an antique dealer the more you’re have to learn to let go of it because that will be communicated. And you see that there is so much beauty coming and you learn to let go like that, that’s one way.

Interviewer: What is the happiness that you strive for?

Isaac: I strive for just ... I don’t ... well, I don’t strive for it. It’s like ... good companionship ... at classes ... I enjoy that. I enjoy being with people and slowly drawing them out and it’s like people aren’t used to it. I want them to challenge. I want them to discuss, whatever and sometimes they do and sometimes they don’t. And seeing people come along who were so shy and repressed and ... in the group, in this safe place, they find their voice and they’ve come back and,
“Oh, I’ve been able to say this and do this in the world.” So I take great joy in seeing people develop.

Interviewer: I can see that in your eyes. A born teacher ... that you see delight in seeing your student progress.

Isaac: Yeah, yeah. And if they get better than me than I’m even more delighted. You know. It is the greatest thing that a student does better than you. It’s fantastic! It’s like, ah, I helped them on the path and fantastic and now maybe they can help me [laughs].

Interviewer: That’s great. Some teacher will not like that or hold back.

Isaac: It’s silly. In antique business, if there’s one shop, OK. If there are two shops then that’s better. If there are three shops that’s even better – more people will come. Five, seven ... when it gets to ... there’s a critical mass and at that point people needs to start to specialise. But the more the better. Same with dharma. The centre ... it’s been 30 years people have been saying that it’ll be good to have a centre around ... My hope is, OK, this will inspire other teachers to come, other groups to get something ... and the more the better as far as I’m concerned. In the aboriginal tradition this country is very important because this is sunrise country where the sun first touches the Earth. Things have got to move out from here. We have to work together ... brothers, sisters.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Field notes

12th April 2005 – Arrival and Interviews

- I had picked up a rental car from Avis the night before. I needed a car with cruise control because my back was bothering me and a long journey without it would have been torture.
- After several hours driving on motorways and picturesque country roads I arrived at Isaac's house. It was quite difficult to get to but thanks to great instructions I managed to not get lost. However, it was quite a taxing and tiring drive.
- The house was perched on a hill and it had confusing entrance and was steep with loose gravel. Managed to get up OK though.
- It was very quite and I walked around the house which seemed empty. Luckily, Abby was came out to greet me and she was very pleasant. She showed me to my room which was a small but wonderful room with a panoramic lookout over green hills that stretched for miles. After freshening up I came out and Abby made some tea and had a conversation out on the porch. It was a fine, sunny but cool day – perfect. Isaac was doing something so I talked to Abby for 10-15 minutes. It was very nice. She was light but showed seriousness on issues as well, but our conversation was just informal and I didn’t make it more want to go into heavy stuff yet. But on hindsight I
regretted not taping those few minutes. They were any great but were insightful concerning Abby. Never mind!

- When Isaac was finally available we quickly decided to have the interview right away. It lasted a long time: nearly 2 hours non-stop. But Isaac was keen. Only Abby came and told us that it was past 1 o’clock and we had a quick break.
- After the break, I decided to finish early and continue later. So I did that. Isaac had to go somewhere and I had a sandwich lunch with Abby. I helped her in the kitchen prepare and talked to her informally about her husband. We had a good laugh but it was useful.
- I had not made up my mind whether to interview Abby or not but in the afternoon after a bit of rest I interviewed her in any case. I did not have much time and I felt rushed – the long trip and conversation with Isaac earlier was still spinning around in my head. I couldn’t seem to settle down interviewing her.

12th April 2005 - Evening

- Late in the afternoon I went with Isaac to the Buddhist centre in town. We were accompanied by the neighbours and the daughters. I thought that that was very good. Their relationship must be great based on vicinity of houses and spiritual tradition. Great!
- The Buddhist centre in Kenwood is built by Isaac’s friend, a Zen practitioner. It had beautiful wooden structure with 2 curved beams hanging on the ceiling. It was small (not much more than 10 by 6 metres) but exudes Zen calmness, simplicity and elegance (sketch in diary, April 9 2005). It was also a warm/cozy place (atmosphere). It had large glass windows on one side, and you step down from a slope on to the front porch (used as coffee area at breaks). Large trees overhang above made the place special. Entrance into the hall was via two large Japanese style doors. See diary (page 9/4/05) for diagram sketch.
- Isaac sat at the far end of the hall alone on a mat as the teacher. The rest of the people sat on the sides, single file. (Sometimes, Venerable Amaravo would come to teach the sessions).
- Sessions run from roughly 6.30 to 8.30 pm but often overrun because Isaac and others like to talk (This is according to Abby).
- Today there are 17 people a few of whom turn up late but enter in very quietly. There is a good mix of ages. 10 women and 7 men. The group included 3 people from the family next to Isaac – we got a ride from them in their Toyota Rav 4. There was one somewhat strange Thai man who had been in Kenwood for 5 years and came for English conversation. He looked an artistic type and he looked rather scruffy. I sat next to a gay man (I think) with permed hair. He told me he had been there for 1.5 years nearly every week because “it keeps me sane” and somewhat sarcastically adds “… or insane.” He looked rather disturbed or edgy.
- I took some dharma books and CDs which were for free distribution with donation sign nearby. I gave $5.
- The session started with a young woman in her 20’s asking a question on how to deal with a coming death of her grandmother because she found it
very difficult. Isaac seemed to share the pain that was quite apparent on her face. He answered as best he could and as lesson for all that was there. He talked for a and as part of the solution recommended about spoiling oneself a little in crisis situations rather than self-mortification – this was a doorway to self love and acceptance (this reminded me of Quinn mention of people having a hard time loving themselves). This also had the effect of filling the needs first (satisfying the void). The woman seemed to appreciate his advice a lot. Then Isaac spoke about more deeper Buddhist techniques.

- As more people come in, he is ready to begin formally but it is pretty informal (he called the sessions earlier “meditation and conversation” at home). I feel like Isaac is doing similar to a group of psychotherapy. He is very at home in front and looks serene and compassionate. He takes questions seriously. Isaac is very knowledgeable in Buddhism and therapy, combining both smoothly. He digs very deeply into theory and practice of Buddhism and his knowledge of terms and concepts is impressive. I record some of his talks.
- Some phrases he used: “radical non-interfering” meaning to let go and mindfulness; “unfabricated state of mind” meaning a state of just being; “natural state of mind is formless.”
- To my surprise, most people, despite the depth of Isaac’s word, were quite attentive throughout. No one showed any sign of boredom or lost of focus one might expect. There was hardly a noise to disturb the atmosphere.
- The session follows with a 40-minute meditation which is fully guided by Isaac (i.e. he talked all through to guide). I found it enjoyable and calmed my mind which was swirling from the rush of the trips and interviews. Meditation started with considering the elements in Buddhism, then covered breath work, and ended with compassion for others. He explained during the break that he guided because most people there were not experienced meditators. Break involved tea and biscuit on the porch. I stayed and made notes and did not mingle.
- After the meditation, Isaac asked around the room to share experiences in meditation.
- Isaac had a big book next to him: “Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge.”
- At the break, I talked with Isaac briefly. He was knowledgeable on Thai history (I think he got information from the book by Silkworm). He blamed the Sangha act of 1901 by Rama 5 for Buddhism much demise in Thailand. He talked approvingly of how Buddhadasa criticised the Thai sangha.
- After break, we discussed the subject of “What sustains you?” especially for me! It was very nice of him. First man answered with “Optimism: John Howard will be dead” which received a huge roar of laughter from everyone. I enjoyed this very much. I guess you can tell the political leanings of this bunch.
- For Isaac what sustained him was “deep joy. Appreciation of people, kindness. The challenge, journey, adventure. Community.”

12th April 2005 – Late Evening
- Around 9.30pm he came into my bedroom with 2 albums of his pictures and activities. He talked about them passionately for one hour. Some of the main highlight included: his witnessing of Rainbow serpent ceremony of the
aboriginals – he was the first group of white men to witness this (about 3 years ago); he received the title of ‘Wititj’ as the custodian of aboriginal knowledge; we has been in other ceremonies of great honour for him; he organised intercultural exchange between White, Laotian Buddhist monks and Aboriginals. He said that he greatly appreciated the different views of the world he gained. He said that aboriginal culture is great at the idea of embodiment of knowledge within us. While this may not be the ultimate truth, it is very interesting and parallels much of Buddhism.

• I was very tired and really wanted to go to bed but I felt that if he wanted to share his life then it was my job to listen. I did that and it was all very fascinating though long. Don’t think my concentration was very good.

• I didn’t sleep well that night. Although the room was nice I was in a strange place with all sorts of things flying around in my head, and exhausted physically and mentally. It was also very cold.

13th April 2005

• I finished my interview with Isaac in the morning over toast. He made Mexican spicy soup for the lunch for everybody and took a huge pot to the temple.

• Isaac explained that the retreat centre that he was building was dedicated especially for monks who had been displaced from Asia. Many Western monks including a number of Australians get ordained in Thailand but on return it is very hard for them. There are very few centres with emphasis on practice around Australia. An example is the centre near Perth in the Thai forest tradition of Ajahn Chah. But if you join them you have to do exactly the same as they do. Well many monks don’t fit in exactly. So often these Western monks will come back and after a while they disrobe – there is nothing to sustain them especially community of monastic and lay friends. Hence, this centre will be for monks of all traditions – these are all welcome. Courses for lay people will also be conducted once it is established and lay people will become an integral part. Isaac is willing to be very patient and knows he has to. This project is long-term but he is very committed and confident that things will happen. I was encouraged by his determination and good will.

• We talked for over an hour and were late leaving around 10am. He was going to there the whole day doing working with Mark.

• We arrived at the temple around 20 minutes by car from the Springwood.

• I met a German Buddhist who was an architect living near Muirfield and working in Germany and Australia. This was his second visit to the temple although he had been a Buddhist for a while now. He was not married, spoke with a strong German accent and was pleasant. I helped him prepare the lunch which was salad and bread + soup from Isaac.

• Venerable Amaravo came soon – he mainly is vegetarian. He was very informal and nice and chatted with us freely in his informal robes (angsa). He was 65 and had ordained at Wat Bavorn then went to study with Mahasi Sayadaw in Burma. However, he emphasised that he welcome all traditions in Buddhism. He also explained a lot about how Buddhism has had to adopt to Western and Australian culture. However, he performs the ritual to Thais when needed.
Venerable Amaravo had begun setting up a retreat centre in New South Wales but there was some problem when the land was taken away. So after doing quite a lot of work there he had to abandon the whole thing. Now they have to start from scratch again.

We had lunch together on the lovely verandah looking at the hills. The land is 88 acres and donated with co-ownership. Isaac, Venerable Amaravo and the Architect then discussed their plans for the place with maps and etc.

The temple was to be called something like 'Bodhi tree meditation and retreat centre’ but the name was not finalised. Venerable Amaravo showed me the Bodhi tree which was grown from a seed from the original tree in Sri Lanka planted by King Asoka’s daughter. Theravada Buddhism then spread from Sri Lanka to Asia.

Lastly, before I left I donated $100 to the Venerable Amaravo and he gave the Thai Buddhist blessings.

Then we toured the place in Isaac's four-wheel drive small van which he bought for $500 and spent $1000 on it. He said it was a good deal. It had a bad sliding the door that didn’t like to stay shut. The terrain was hilling and extremely beautiful with old trees. The road was not really a road, just a track and it was strictly 4-wheel access (e.g. crossing a creek at beginning). I was showed all the planned kutti's [small huts for monks] and salas [open gazebo-like buildings]. Some of the kutti’s were going to be near a stream. It was a picturesque location and I took some photos. At the highest point of the plot you could see over the huge vista below. There was a clearing with no trees and so I was quite warm but it was lovely. They had difficulty with money and also needed to clear a lot of lantana weed.

I bid farewell and went back to talk to Abby at home briefly and then left for Brisbane around 4.20pm. It was a very useful and again insightful trip. They were gracious hosts and we enjoyed each others’ company. We got along well I have no doubt. I also was willing to help Isaac raise some money for the temple retreat, but didn’t know how.

**Conference Essay**

*This is something Isaac wrote for a conference in 2005. It is entitled ‘Standing up Alive for Healing; People reminding each other of each other.” It remains in its original form including some grammatical errors.*

I was invited to this symposium as I am a both a Buddhist practitioner/ teacher of Buddha Dharma, and I have been ceremonially empowered as the first non-indigenous custodian of the Wititj (Rainbow Snake) Law of the Galpu Clan of Eastern Arnhem Land.

It was completely unexpected when I was made a custodian of Wititj Law. The ceremony is one that only 3 non-Yolngu had ever even seen before. Gurritjiri, The Song Man supported by Djalu his brother, another senior Lawman, was inspired to just put me in the ceremony and sing me up as I danced. I was also sung the name Wititj, which is rare as a name. After ceremony Djalu said. "Very
good to have that name, not many have that name. This is all for healing, for you to be a bridge."

To share any depth with you I have to speak of my roles and activities. In traditional Yolngu (and Buddhist) culture these things would be left unsaid, as they would be common knowledge. In my role as ‘a bridge’ I have to talk of them, though it is awkward for me.

In another role, I have walked the Buddha’s path for over 30 years, and teach the Dharma and meditation at two groups a week called “Reading the Book of the Heart”, and sometimes in small retreats I call “Waking up in the Bush”, where we camp in the bush and practice and create ceremony. Doing this and getting older I find some Lao and Thai people calling me Ajahn or Teacher.

This paper builds bridges between the Buddhist and Australian Indigenous traditions, and in doing so, affirms a strength of both traditions: an open willingness to embrace the best of the cultures they encounter, and link them to their own teachings.

The Wititj Law (Rainbow Snake Law) is an ancient body of knowledge about peace, diplomacy, healing, and compassion encoded in song cycles and dance ceremony. Western Archaeologists say the physical evidence, in rock art, of this Law dates back to the end of the last ice age. This makes the Rainbow serpent the most ancient continuously used tradition and symbol for peace on the planet. The massive climate change of this time created many refugees as sea levels rose, flooding vast coastal plains that are now seabed. The Rainbow Serpent Law arose as a way to build peace, reconcile and heal relationships between all these clan groups that the water had thrown together. The energy of Compassion or fellow feeling that arises from the wisdom that sees our common humanity, is the vital force that drives the impulse to peace. Some lines from one of the Wititj song cycles called Waluka/Rain is eloquent about fellow feeling. “Dolphins singing, like people singing. People reminding each other of each other. Like people crying in Ceremony. Young People listen. Young people understand what we mean to each other.” Dolphins represent freedom to Yolngu people.

That I was made the first non-Yolngu custodian of this Law in about 6,000 years, at a time when the opening movements of the symphony of destruction that is human-induced Global Climate Change are already upon us, is a little spine tingling for me. It seems that billions of humans and thousands of species will be wiped out - casualties in our war of consumption against the earth and each other.

If we pay attention to what is happening in the world it is obvious that unless we become active in healing our relationships with each other and the world, then all our spiritual talk is simply ‘fiddling while we burn’.

The Buddha
Though the Buddha ‘left the world’ in his quest for Awakening; upon attaining that extraordinary state of human development, he returned and took up a dynamic role in the society of his times. He walked the breadth of northern India many times in his 40-year teaching career, mixing with cowherds and kings. To the general population he advised ways to live a good, productive and non-oppressive life at a personal and structural level. He taught the basic ethics of non-harming and non-oppression. He continuously taught the principles and practice of Loving Kindness, Compassion, Joyful Appreciation and Forbearance or Equanimity, called the four divine or uplifted states and the principles of kindness, truthfulness, generosity, contentment and heedfulness that are encoded in his 5 precepts.

He reserved his unique teaching on insight into the essential impermanence, stressfulness and no-self-ness of all phenomena for those who had established some confidence in his approach and wanted to go deeper. In fact the stability of mind necessary to delve into the depth of the teachings depends on a profound foundation in healthy, skillful or good action, ‘kusala.’ He also directly intervened in, and stopped at least 2 wars.

> All tremble before the club,  
> all are fearful of death and all hold their life dear.  
> Drawing the parallel to yourself,  
> neither kill nor get others to kill.  
> Buddha

**The Buddha and Indigenous life ways**

To understand the profound link between the Buddha’s ‘social teachings’ and Indigenous Life Ways it’s important to understand that Siddhartha Gotama, The Buddha to be, was born into a ruling family of the Sakyan ‘tribal republic.’ His father, Suddhodana, was an elected head of a hereditary ruling class or oligarchy. His father was NOT a king and he was NOT a Prince. At the time of his birth the notion of 'kingship' was on the rise, and the cancer of empire was destroying and consuming the ancient tribal republics. The land of the neighbouring clan was already annexed by an ‘empire builder’, and the Buddha lived to see the conquest of his Sakyan Clan and their republic. By the time of the Buddha’s death all the republics had been defeated and annexed by various empires.

The Buddha is on record as holding the model of the Tribal Republics to be a system superior to Empire, because he saw that the notion of kingship was based on Individualism. People subverting the shared power of the councils of republics and taking all the ‘power’ for themselves, by 'putting themselves above others', in the Buddhas words.

**Individualism is not the same as the notion of individuality.** Individualism sees one’s own worth and needs above those of others. Individuality appreciates the value of each Individual ~ of one self and others. Individualism is pathological or sick confidence, because it only sees the self and its ‘needs’. The
mental power of Saddha, the confidence/respect mind of Buddhist teachings (often translated weakly as ‘faith’) manifests internally as healthy clarity and confidence in oneself AND as respect for others. Until the balance is right we are prey to inflation either way. Puffing ourselves up and putting others down or putting others above us and putting ourselves down. Saddha grows as we learn to accept ourselves and develop the confidence to truly walk the path. This befriending of ourselves opens us to more ready acceptance of others because this sort of love opens us to our common humanity.

In many ways the general ethical or social teachings of the Buddha were his way of countering the rising tide of individualism that he saw spreading from the ‘tsunami of Empire.’ Many values that the Buddha praised are core values of indigenous peoples. It is not that the potential for greed, hatred and delusion is any less in indigenous peoples; rather many manifestations of these things are held in check by indigenous social structures.

The Buddha saw these indigenous life ways swamped in Northern India in his life time. In my life time the last remote Aboriginal groups in Australia were contacted, and the same processes of social devastation are occurring.

I weep for what is being lost. Lines of knowledge, oral transmission stretching back thousands and thousands of years are being extinguished RIGHT NOW. Some of the old people I have had the honour of knowing didn’t see ‘their first white man’ till their late teens or early twenties. They grew up in intact clan groups of the most ancient culture on the planet. As they die the depth is lost. Dear old Mowaljarlai said this before he died. “When we old fellers are dead, gone... that fire that has been burning since creation times will still be burning ~ but who will know how to see it?” Each generation has less and less knowledge and deep embodiment of pre-contact culture.

The Buddha consciously built into the structure of his ordained Sangha, the community of monks and nuns, many of the principles encoded in the systems of the tribal republics. His teaching to the lay community emphasised giving, kindness and tolerance.

In the weeks before the Buddha’s death, King Ajatasattu sought the Buddha's views on his desire to conquer one of the remaining republics, the Vajjian Republic. The Buddha replied that as the people of the Vajjian Republic still followed key principles of their culture - which he had previously approved (remember the Vajjis are not Buddhists) - then the welfare and growth of their culture could only be expected to flourish; indeed no harm could come to them, "except through treachery or discord..."

Among the 7 key principals are:

1. The Vajjis have frequent gatherings, and their meetings are well attended
2. They assemble and disperse peacefully and attend to their affairs in concord.
3. They proceed in accordance with their ancient constitutions.
4. They show respect, honour, esteem, and veneration towards their elders and think it worthwhile to listen to them.
5. They refrain from abusing the rights of women and taking away their liberty.
6. They show respect, ... towards their shrines, and do not deprive them of the due offerings.” (Note, these are not Buddhist shrines)
7. They protect and guard arahats [awakened ones], so that those who have not come to the realm yet might do so, and those who have already come might live there in peace.”

Calling all the monks and nuns living in the district to assemble he recommended the Vajjian model to them. These he laid out in the 7 conditions of welfare for the Sangha. The major modifications were ~ point 5 became an explicit injunction against "coming under the power of craving or grasping." Point 6 became "cherishing the forest depths for their dwellings." Point 7 became the encouragement to establishment of mindfulness/ presence with awareness, satipattana, so that “members of the Order who have not come yet might do so, and those already come might live in peace. If the Sangha kept to these conditions, and was known for doing so, it’s welfare and growth would be expected, he said. Thus the tradition of local and pan Sangha Councils comes directly from the tribal Republics.

2,500 years on, the ordained Sangha is still going and is still struggling with the ever increasing influence of individualism, in the form of consumer culture.

The core value of Giving or Dana ~ The Economy of the Gift, rather than the economy of the market.
Dana, giving or generous action, is taught and praised often by the Buddha and is integral to the ethical foundation necessary for success in the higher training of meditation.

"If beings knew, as I know, the results of giving & sharing, they would not eat without having given, nor would the stain of miserliness overcome their minds. Even if it were their last bite, their last mouthful, they would not eat without having shared, if there were someone to receive their gift. But because beings do not know, as I know, the results of giving & sharing, they eat without having given. The stain of miserliness overcomes their minds." (Iti 26)

The grasping of consumerism was seen as a great danger to the world by the Buddha even in the basic forms set loose by the trend to individualism of the early Indian kingdoms. Emphasising Dana was one way he sought to mitigate its effects.

Clinging or grasping, Upadana, often translated by western scholars as ‘attachment’, is a key link in the causal chain leading to views of self. This link is to be abandoned. The word the Buddha chose for this key term is instructive. Upa + dana is literally ‘non-giving’; that is taking, or in the slang of addicts ‘using’. I often use Master Chin Kung’s saying: “If you want to learn about Letting Go, practice giving for 6 years".
Right here we see the indivisibility of inner and outer action in the Buddhist systems of training or practice. Inner and outer peace affect each other. Giving lays the ground for renunciation and the complete Letting Go that is Unbinding or Nirvana. This Awakening (Bodhi) sees the mutual interdependence of all things.

The ethic of sharing is equally strong in indigenous cultures. I once asked Mowaljarlai, a senior elder of the Ngariyin people of the Kimberley in NW Western Australia. “What is your main memory of childhood?” Immediately, he said "Joy ~ I was serving at that time, getting firewood and cooking kangaroo for old people, for anybody. When we were in a hunting area and a man brought a kangaroo, I would jump up and collect wood, and dig a cooking hole. That was my job. I felt proud, and the old people ~ they feel really proud because they wouldn’t have to tell me to do this, to tell me to do this and that, because I had learnt. The community was my family; it was my culture, my responsibility to learn.

"I was learning to grow up with a good heart. I wanted the old people to be proud of me and they blessed me and praised me. I was really happy - I was filled up. It was really a time of great joy; I couldn't have been happier. It gave me a good start in life so I could control myself. I really appreciate that. And now, today, I can still hear those old people talking to me. I hear their voices. Really! From mother, uncle or granny [a granny is a person who teaches you Law - male or female], all of them. I can still hear them talking to me, wherever I go. That's very precious to me.

"That's how we learnt, and even in my old age, they are still talking to me. It's stayed with me like glue; it's glued in my body, in my mind. This is how I am today. This great start in life is how I began. When the drinking started in the Seventies with the citizenship rights, people with my training were able to resist it better than the younger ones, who didn't have our training and life experience. So when that alcohol business came, my life was able to hold me solid as a rock [against it].

"Among the pressure and the life changes, I can hear my ancestors keep talking to me. The younger ones [growing up at a time of social dislocation and oppression] don't have the sound of the ancestors in their mind talking to them. They have nothing and they are lost. They can't hold up against anything. This is very important. That's what makes me sad. They don't want to listen to me. I have to take them away, out bush, away from alcohol; otherwise they got wet brain seven days a week. When they are dried out, you got to fill them up with something. You got to plant seeds of wisdom in dry brains, no alcohol. You can't do it with alcohol around, learning just slips away. Once they are on it, they are really on it ~ wrecked livers and kidneys. They die. They can't stand up against it all ~ cant decide anything ~ just go along with it all."

If we substitute the words 'consumerism' and 'materialism' for the word 'alcohol', old Mowaljarlai is talking to all the 'developed' world. 2,500 years ago the
Buddha saw the same things happening and chose to 'Stand up Alive' against it. Perhaps its time to 'sober up' globally - to let go of taking mind and balance the 'economy of the market' with a generous heart and 'the economy of the gift'.

**Reciprocal protection ~ inner peace outer peace**

In a small discourse, the Buddha tells a humorous story of a Bamboo pole juggler and his apprentice.

"There was once a pair of jugglers who performed their acrobatic feats on a bamboo pole. One day the master said to his apprentice: "Now get on my shoulders and climb up the bamboo pole." When the apprentice had done so, the master said: "Now protect me well and I shall protect you! By protecting and watching each other in that way, we shall be able to show our skill, make a good profit and safely get down from the bamboo pole." But the apprentice said: "Not so, master! You, O master, should protect yourself, and I too shall protect myself. Thus self-protected and self-guarded we shall safely do our feats."

"The Blessed One spoke: "It is just as the apprentice said: 'I shall protect myself'-in that way the foundations of mindfulness (**satipatthana** - presence with awareness) should be practiced. 'I shall protect others'--in that way the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself.

"And how does one, in protecting oneself, protect others? **By the repeated and frequent practice of meditation** (**asevanaya bhavanaya bahulikammena**).

"And how does one, in protecting others, protect oneself? By patience and forbearance, by a non-violent and harmless life, by loving kindness and compassion." (**Satipatthana Samyutta**, No. 19):

This little discourse is one of many important practical teachings of the Buddha still hidden like buried treasure in the vast texts of the Pali Cannon. As it is stamped with the royal seal of **satipatthana** (the practice of presence with awareness) which is the core method of Insight practice, there is an additional claim to our attention.

The sutta or discourse deals with the relations between ourselves and our fellow beings, between the individual and society. It sums up in a few words the Buddhist attitude to the problems of individual and social ethics, of egoism and altruism. The gist of it is contained in those two concise sentences:

"Protecting oneself, one protects others." (**Attanam rakkhanto param rakkhati**)
"Protecting others, one protects oneself." (**Param rakkhanto attanam rakkhati**)

These lines depend on each other and must to be quoted together.

True Buddhism is Practice. Each person is invited and challenged to embody the different levels of the teaching. The Buddha said it was completely acceptable in
his teachings for a person do practice simply have a good life; or to have a good rebirth; or finally, to go beyond all ‘becoming’ and attain Awakening.” But for each aim one has to do the work and embody that particular level of training. It’s no good just imagining or hoping for a better life; one has to do those things which cause a better life.

The path of practice is developmental; it is an education process, just as the initiatory process in indigenous culture is a life long process of embodying the Laws. (A white fella at a ceremony, where I was a ‘ceremonial boss’ or Bungalwa asked my Clan brother, a senior Yolngu Songman of the Wittij Law, why he wasn’t painted up for ceremony like other people. A friend of mine fondly put his arm around him and said, "This old man doesn’t need painting up, this old man is the painting."

So Buddhists practice to embody the Buddha Law so we can 'Walk our Talk' as my Indigenous brothers and sisters 'Dance their Song'.

In this sense Buddhists don’t ‘meditate.’ Meditation is an English word that has none of the implications of the Pali word ‘Bhavana’ - usually translated as 'meditation'. Bhavana is mental development or cultivation. Its root meaning is ‘to make something manifest’. Thus there are specific ‘meditative’ and non-‘meditative’ practices to help develop specific qualities, behaviours and insights. If one wants to develop tranquility then one does the bhavana to develop tranquillity. The same goes for developing insight or compassion or non-harming and so forth. As a comprehensive training of body, speech and mind, there is no clear line marking 'inner practice and 'outer practice'; one supports the other. Understanding that Buddhist practice is an educative process involving our behaviour, not just our thinking, resolves the ‘inner’/ ‘outer’ dichotomy.

Patience / forbearance (khanti) is top of the list of bhavanas for protecting oneself and protecting others. The Buddha refers to it as the greatest austerity” If we 'lose our patience” and give way to irritation or hostility then good will, safety and trust can evaporate before our eyes. This has been a long and difficult practice for me.

The Yolngu Elders who made me a custodian say that a true ‘warrior’ (meaning a mature man) is one who has a cool heart in the most difficult circumstances. Being patient, not hot headed, is the way to get through. It’s fairly easy to throw a spear or pull a trigger. It’s very hard to keep a cool heart and build relationships with those who oppose, abuse or try to control you. (We playfully called this 'broken spear law'). It is those occasions when I have been able to deal with difficult, abusive or power motivated people in this way of the cool heart, that I have been most praised by senior indigenous elders.

A Culture of Creativity and Healing - or Creation and Wholeness ~ an ethos to take us beyond the dance of War and Peace.

For many years I ran the first groups in New South Wales for Violent and Abusive men which lead to working with men and women, perpetrators and victims of all
sorts of violence. Creativity, patience and forbearance and a certain fearlessness that comes from the practice, were some of the qualities necessary to cultivate in this work! Working with violence for many years, I came to suspect that the notion of ‘peace’ was too limited. A true alternative to the war and conflict culture needs to have more dynamism, more energy than that implied by the passive word ‘peace.’ As someone once said; we need to find a better game than war.

War is simply State- or community-sanctioned violence and abuse. To go beyond, to go completely beyond War we need to tackle the root, which is the use of violence and abuse to get what we want, at every level. At its most subtle, this means giving up the personal fantasy of being in control.

I used to tell people in my groups that they would need to go through 5 or 6 levels before they could consider themselves 'safe' or 'defused'. Believing an ‘all better now feeling’ before the last level would only land them back in trouble. Early levels include various sorts of emotional relief that come from squarely facing the problem and better communication and conflict resolution skills. These are useful, but won't be enough without the last level - “being comfortable not being in control”; without it, the impulse to control through power-over strategies still ache to get out. Jung said. “Where there is will to power there is no love, where there is love there is no will to power.”

Speak harshly to no one,
or the words will be thrown
right back at you.
Contentious talk is painful,
for you get struck in return.

If, like a flattened metal pot
you don't resound,
you’ve attained an Unbinding;
in you there’s found ~ no contention.

Buddha

’S strategic' violence and abuse are the methods of war. As I continued the sobering but fruitful study of violence, I looked at some dictionaries to see what the ‘word wisdoms’ had to say about the matter. What I found was a revelation that set off a wave of pattern recognition in me.

I realised that the notion of 'Peace' is radically flawed as a vision for humanity as it is inextricably bound to, indeed defined by, War. Peace is a great base camp not a final destination. The word ‘peace’ comes from the Indo European root word pag meaning to fasten. Peace is simply an agreement not to wage war or to end hostilities. Thus the state of peace is inextricably linked to the state of war. Perhaps one of the reasons we haven’t grown beyond the use of war is that the ‘peace' we strive for is simply the absence of something and is thus a passive state that relies upon war for its definition. Don’t get me wrong, peace is an important step and it would be nice if it happened in the world.
A standard definition of Violence is: “Actions that cause or are intended to cause destruction and injury.” Looking further I found that Violence comes from the Indo European root word *Urio* which means ‘humanity and the vital force in humans’. *Urio* became *Vis* or *strength* in Latin and then goes into English as violence, virtue, vitality etc. In Indian languages *Urio* became *Viriya* or *Vayama*, as in the term *samma vayama*, the right or integral effort or vitality of the Buddha’s Ennobling Eightfold Path.

I put these meanings together and came up with this definition. **Violence is the misuse of one’s life force that leads to destruction or injury (of one self or others).** So now I had an accurate ‘diagnosis’ the question of the cure remained. What’s the opposite of Violence? The absence of an antonym in the English language indicated a deep cultural malaise. Peace is not the opposite. Peace at root simply means an end to war, and war is only one type of ritualised violence. Peace is thus an absence of something; as such it is a passive state.

**The opposite of violence is the proper use of one’s life force that leads to creativity and healing or creation and wholeness.** Creation / creativity is the opposite of destruction, and healing/ wholeness is the opposite of injury. Now here is something to work with, here is something one can use to build a transformative vision. Now we can 'stand up alive' for what we are FOR.

It's all too easy to say or protest what one is against. Saying what one is FOR is another matter. When we are *against* something or someone it's easy to put everything outside ourselves and dump on, or act upon some *Other*. Saying and acting upon what we are *for* is far more challenging. When we start on this course the transformative fires start heating up; as it becomes increasingly obvious, if we are honest with ourselves, where our personal convictions are out of alignment with our actions.

In ‘The Second Coming' W.B.Yeates' prophetic voice called out in a cry of the heart.

‘Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.’

Clearly knowing and testing, in our behaviour and working out what we are for is part of the work of becoming a person of conviction. Otherwise we become 'priests' of convention rather than prophets for transformation. The 'prophetic
work’ I am talking about is bringing justice and compassion into the world by 
embodying these things.

**Remember You are Beautiful, Stand up Alive, Be Committed**

These three things are the keystones of Ngarinyin Law. My old friend Mowaljarlai 
has gone now, but I still hear his words. That old man crossed the continent to 
come to a gathering I helped organise. He greeted the 90 men who had come 
with these words. “I have come from my country to this place, and its beautiful 
country here. Look around... This country is beautiful. You are part of this 
country, this earth. That means you are beautiful too. **All you got to do is 
remember that. Remember you are Beautiful, Stand up Alive and be Committed.**” The effect was electric with blessing-power and many were moved 
to tears.

“**Yorro Yorro**, In Ngarinyin, means 'Everything Standing Up Alive'; it is connected 
to the Wandjina law. The Wandjina, the creator beings painted in rock shelters in 
the Kimberley Stand up Alive. They bring the rain that makes everything stand 
up alive. That’s it. All of life standing up alive. So stand up with life. That’s it. 1. 
Remember you are beautiful, 2. Stand up Alive and 3. Be committed.

This leads to the 'clear, confident mind' (*saddha* in Buddhism) that is necessary 
for spiritual practice. It overcomes the paralysis of ambivalence and conflicted-
ness. As you recognise your own beauty, you recognise the beauty of every one 
and every thing - the indivisibility of the whole. Align with essential goodness ~ 
esential humanity. Embody it. Be the painting. This is what we are FOR.
Interview

Part 1 (13 April 05)

Interviewer: What lead you to take up Buddhism?

Abby: I had a ... I guess a spontaneous spiritual experience as a teenager ... a kind of opening into the interconnectedness, the oneness of everything. And at that time I was nominally Presbyterian but not ... I had to go to church because I was at boarding school, so church is what you did on Sundays ... but it wasn't something that meant a whole lot to me. But then I had that experience.

Interviewer: What was that?

Abby: I was actually drawing. It was a drawing excursion outside and I was very focused and I guess, you know, single-pointed consciousness and there was suddenly this sort of sense of light everywhere. It was so long ago but the best I could describe it is a sort of sense that I dissolved into everything and everything ... yeah. It was momentary. It was gone in 30 seconds or less but all I could think of, because that was my entire framework, was that ... that was an experience of God. I went along to church the next Sunday full of eagerness and anticipation thinking, you know, ... [laughs]. And yeah it was instantly apparent that this Presbyterian minister preaching hellfire and brimstone - you know that term in Christianity, preaching eternal damnation for your sins - knew nothing about this experience that I'd had. Well, that was in my teenage arrogance I'd just assumed that he knew nothing about this. And I kind of dismissed the whole of Christianity even more than I had before from that point on [laughs]. Just wiped the entire Christian faith from that teenage experience. But I also ... I grew up in New Britain and to my knowledge there was pretty much nothing else to be had in New Britain in the mid 1960's. So I guess I was left with an experience and kind of a question and it just faded into the background of my life. But obviously hung there. Then ... about 10 years later I guess, in 1974, I got the opportunity to travel to India and my younger brother had already been there for a couple of years and was into meditation. So I joined him in India for 3 months and at the end of that time, after meeting some of his friends and listening to him talk about meditation, Buddhism and so on, I went on a 10-day retreat with Goenka-gi.

Interviewer: Is he in Calcutta?

Abby: It was just outside of Bombay or Mumbai. And I liked it so much I did the incredible feat of travelling into Bombay the day after that 10-day retreat and the day before the next one started and extending my visa and changing my plane
ticket and getting back ... yeah, doing 20 days! So I ended up doing 20 days with Goenka.

Interviewer: What effect did the retreats have on you?

Abby: Um ... I’ve been asking that question too because I mean it wasn’t like ... um ... you know, despite that early experience which was quite something. After that I felt like I was just a very pedestrian meditator. It wasn’t like the next lot of experiences came with anything fantastic around it. But it was a sense that there was something in this whole practice and philosophy that was worth exploring further. Plus I think sangha because I was finding that, in a sense ... no, that’s probably the wrong word ... kalayanamitra really but there was ... you know, I was meeting people who I felt were really good people. I’d been living in Canberra from about ‘66 till I went overseas. I went to university at Australian National University and there was something a bit weird about Canberra society then. I didn’t feel like although I was meeting nice people who had good political values it wasn’t congruent with how they were living. And there was something about a sense of these people were good people, that were being attracted to this. 

Interviewer: Is that why you stayed on for the second one?

Abby: Yeah. I can barely remember the words that Goenka spoke after 30 years but it was a sense that happiness was possible and that ... I don’t think I really got for years what suffering really was. I thought it was something that happened to other people who didn’t have enough to eat or who had car accidents or something.

Interviewer: What age were you when you went to the first retreat?

Abby: I was 26 but I was ... I’d say, young and naïve when I look at my children it feels like they know so much more or they’re so much more aware.

Interviewer: After you went to the retreats did you stay on a bit longer?

Abby: Actually I had to leave India because I was on a journey around the world, so all I did was extend my ticket and visa for a bit longer. But then I left pretty much straight after that. But I changed my plans in Europe and went to a retreat in Switzerland soon after that with another teacher who was teaching kind of under and with Goenka at that point. His name was Robert Hover. There were a few teachers: Robert Hover, Ruth ... whose name I forgot, John Coleman who was authorised by Goenka to teach in those early days. But that all changed. He got rid of them and just did the thing with teaching in different parts of the world via the video and the assistant teachers.

Interviewer: And have you been in that tradition, the Goenka method of teaching, all your life?
Abby: No, no, no. After that I came back to Australia and I helped organise retreats for John Coleman and Robert Hover in that tradition. And then my brother wrote to me from India and said that he wanted to bring out a teacher called Christopher Titmus. I don't know whether you've heard of him?

Interviewer: I've heard of him. He writes.

Abby: Yes. And would I help organise and I said, “Yes.” And I did and sat the retreat with Christopher. After that I sort of got ex-communicated from the Goenka group because they don't like you sitting with anyone else if you're part of their group. And I don't like fundamentalism, so I sort of …

Interviewer: So what practice did you do? What tradition?

Abby: Christopher is in the insight tradition or vipassana as you say but not the Goenka tradition.

Interviewer: You say the Mahasi tradition?

Abby: Christopher’s teachers were Buddhadasa ... more the Thai Forest tradition. But living in Australia it’s been very hard to access to one continuous teacher. So I’ve done retreats with many different teachers. I would now consider that I have sort of three teachers at the moment. One is Christopher but he only comes out every two years. One is Subana Bazagi ... she is a student of Christopher but she is also student of Robert Aitken Roshi in the Zen tradition. So she actually holds two teaching traditions, one Zen and one insight. And Patrick Carney who is sort of in the Mahasi tradition. So my practice is whatever I ...

Interviewer: If you practice long enough you become schizophrenic. I’ve seen that with everyone.

Abby: So that’s what happens in Australia.

Interviewer: It's all good as Australians say.

Abby: It’s all good. It’s all good. [laughs] Yeah. What’s the problem? Fit it all together. [laughs]

Interviewer: Has Buddhism and these retreats, practices changed your life?

Abby: Yes.

Interviewer: In what way?

Abby: It immediately took me in a different direction. I mean life direction. I left a marriage; it wasn’t working anyway.

Interviewer: You left a marriage …
Abby: When I came back from that trip overseas. But we were separated anyway. But it became very clear that my life was going in a different direction. I made different sorts of friends. Through that I met Isaac. Through all of that I moved to Chedhi.

Interviewer: You met Isaac. Did you get married?

Abby: Yes. Got married then moved to Chedhi together.

Interviewer: And what was the motivation behind going to Chedhi together?

Abby: Well it was intended at the time ... it hasn't quite worked out that way but it was intended at the time to be a community of people practicing meditation and following the teachings of the Buddha. And in the early days we lived by five precepts and we tried to not have alcohol or marijuana on the community.

Interviewer: I see. Marijuana was common then?

Abby: Marijuana was common in this area then.

Interviewer: OK.

Abby: So that was one of the ways it changed my life. I've got really good friendships that were established in those early days of building community and attending retreats with people. So that’s one way.

Interviewer: Yes and then you were continuing before I interrupted.

Abby: The other way would be gradually over the years ... one’s mind just becomes clearer with oneself, and the way you get caught up in things gets less intense and less all-consuming. In the end there’s more ... well, just much less suffering. Over the years I learnt to recognise suffering very [laughs] ... in a great deal of details.

Interviewer: Yes?

Abby: In my own life. In my own life.

Interviewer: Not just in retreats?

Abby: No, not just in retreats but also in life. And the way the mind feeds that.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Abby: Um ... well. When something happens now that formerly might have been upsetting I immediately recognise the internal bodily sensation that arises and
can detach from the storyline of what’s going on and take a much more conscious approach to dealing with whatever it is rather than just reacting.

Interviewer: What about in your relationship with Isaac.

Abby: Well, it’s been a steep learning curve there that’s for sure.

Interviewer: What kind of experience have you had?

Abby: Well, I think it’s more equanimity now. It’s been a matter of huge effort in the direction of equanimity practice because Isaac and I often do see things differently. We have quite different responses to things and ... it’s been the practice of allowing those differences rather than trying to change to ... I think in the early days there was a sense of ... I had a sense that he had to change so that I could be happy, you know. To a degree that’s true because we certainly had to work on our communication with each other and obviously he has to admit that there was a problem and so on. But there’s also an extent to which now when things are difficult that I recognise that to some extent that’s how he is and then I can wait and choose the right moment to bring things up or decide that for this time I’ll just let that go or I can live with that or not. You know it’s much more of conscious decision now than the reaction that used to happen.

Interviewer: What do you credit that to?

Abby: Look I think it’s got to be as we were talking before there’s never just one cause [laughs]. So it’s obviously a mixture of maturity but it’s something that I still have to work on and it’s still a practice. So it is practice of watching the sensations arise if there’s a reaction and deciding, making the choice of what response to make.

Interviewer: I see. So when Isaac says something you dislike you would watch the sensations?

Abby: Yes.

Interviewer: Would that be when you have good awareness?

Abby: Yes, when I have good awareness. But that’s much more continuous now. If I get too busy or too pressured it can go but it’s a much more even ... Yeah, I’m much more ... much less likely to be upset in a really intense way by things now than I used to be. And it’s wonderful!

Interviewer: Let me ask you what your idea of happiness is?

Abby: Ah, happiness is a general sense of ... well ... it’s somewhere on a continuum from a deep sense of contentment with how things are to joy, I guess. Yes. So it a bit of a continuum.
Interviewer: And how do you experience that?

Abby: Um ... a sense of internal well-being.

Interviewer: What’s that?

Abby: [laughs]

Interviewer: Maybe you can give an example of when you experience it.

Abby: Well, right now. It’s partly physical, you know. I feel as though I can sort of feel sensation of warmth and well-being in the heart centre of the body. I’m enjoying just sitting here reflecting on this and I can hear the birds in the background. I think it’s the readiness of the heart to notice that. It’s very much about being present, in the moment and just responsive to what is.

Interviewer: Compared to other kinds of happiness and pleasure what is the ultimate kind of happiness?

Abby: Yes, this is. Anything else is essentially unsatisfactory because impermanence is the Buddhist thing. Yes, I mean I can get pleasure from material possessions but that’s not happiness; that’s pleasure. I distinguish quite clearly between pleasure and happiness. Pleasure is associated with a thing like a material possession or going to a good movie or eating some good food or something. And it’s nice and it’s not to be scoffed at – it’s part of having a good life. But it’s essentially ... yeah, you can't rely on that ... that’s conditioned ... it’s anicca.

Interviewer: That’s interesting. It makes perfect sense but I didn’t theorise that separation that clearly before. That’s really good to know.

Abby: So the sense of well-being has ... it’s hard to say this definitively because I have enough to eat and I have a roof over my head and I have not experienced ... well, for a long time we were quite poor but we never were never like that. So I know what it is to be quite poor and now we’re not quite so poor, so that’s nice. But maybe that will come again, who knows. I would like to think that this sense that I have though is more solid now and less able to be pulled around by the eight worldly conditions.

Interviewer: If you were poor again do you think you would be able to cope?

Abby: Um ... I think I’m in a reasonable condition to cope with that. Yes. Because ... partly because through my work I’ve made a lot of contact with people who are poor and who live very simply by choice. And so it’s not ... I think it’s harder when we in just one kind of ... like if you had just lived in middle class suburbia and you just had contact with everybody else that you had friendships with all lived in middle class suburbia, the sense of believing that that is reality and I don’t believe that that is reality. I believe that that’s a choice that people make and it’s
choice that I’m choosing this moment to live in this kind of lifestyle. But it’s not the only lifestyle that I have contact with or see around me. And because my journey sort of takes me into households like that – you know, I sleep on mattresses on the floor and do all that kind of stuff. When we lived at Chedhi I’ve lived with twins on a community where we had no facilities like electricity or hot water in the house even. Now I wouldn’t recommend it as a life choice but I’ve done it and I feel that – I don’t know if I’d ever want to wash nappies by hand again in my life [laughs], I’m too old I don’t have to think about that but ... Yes, I know there are many choices about how we can live and that there are ways that we ... and I recognise very clearly that, as it’s currently set up, this lifestyle is not sustainable, in planetary terms, without significant changes. And I’m not at this point all that convinced that the technology is going to save us. So it’s a consciousness that I carry with me all the time is that ... this is not necessarily permanent.

Interviewer: What’s your purpose in life?

Abby: My purpose in life is to ... to live in service of life. To live in service of life now and the ongoing ability of life to continue to unfold in the future. And obviously life will continue to unfold in the future.

Interviewer: Life in terms of every life form?

Abby: Every life form. And as many as possible that we’ve got at the moment, and try to alleviate suffering wherever I find it.

Interviewer: And what gave you this purpose?

Abby: I think it was a combination ... it is a combination of a life-long interest in social and then environmental justice and my Buddhist practice. And in particular how those two things converge when I came across the work of Joanna Macy.

Interviewer: So were you greatly influenced by Joanna Macy?

Abby: Greatly influenced by Joanna Macy although I was already Buddhist and Christopher Titmus was already my teacher at that point ... and he’s quite an engaged Buddhist in his teaching. But I think it was also the experiential exercises that Joanna introduces in her workshops which are very much based on the Buddhadharma but bring it alive in a whole different way. So for example she has one exercise where you’re sitting in pairs with a person and you just ... and she’s basically going through the brahmaviharas but in a way that really connects them with being alive in the world today and facing the issues and problems in the world.

Interviewer: And tell me, you’ve run the workshops and you’ve done the workshops and when you gave me an example of the four brahmaviharas – can you describe that experience in the workshop and what it did to you?
Abby: Well, we went through *metta* and so then there’s that sense of sharing loving-kindness.

Interviewer: With all beings in the world?

Abby: No, at that point it was just with the person opposite but somehow it made it really more powerful to look into the face of someone opposite and connect at a deep heart, loving-kindness level with someone. It was much more concrete than that abstract sense which I had done before, of sharing it with all beings, that general way. And then *karuna*, looking into the face of a person and seeing in their face the sorrows that are there and the untold sorrow that they may have never shared with another person. Again that very real connection with someone else’s pain without them having to voice it but just knowing that in all lives there are sorrows and pains, even small ones, you know. And then *mudita* there was that lovely sense of joy in the joy of others and the strengths and the gifts that this person might have to share with the rest of the world, what they hadn’t even realise that they could bring forth in the world. And then the most ... the strongest one for me was *ubekha*. And the way Joanna put it was ... she evoked the image of the net of Indra and she says something like, “Out of this vast web you cannot fall. No personal stupidity or failure or any lack of generosity or anything on your part can ever sever you from this living web of life. For that is what you are.” And there was that ... it was like a real sense of coming home to the whole of life in a very deep way.

Interviewer: When did you do that the first time?

Abby: It was exactly 20 years ago.

Interviewer: And you did it with Joanna?

Abby: Actually the first time I did it was with a student of hers called Pat Flemming in 1984 and then she came in January 1985.

Interviewer: Did that first experience change you?

Abby: Yes, I think it did. It really ... for a start it unified those two things that had been so strong aspects of my life up to that point.

Interviewer: So are you saying that they were sort of separate?

Abby: They were sort of separate, yeah. I hadn’t made the connection between the personal and the political if you like or environmental in such a strong sense before. There’d been like there’s my practice and that’s what I do when I’m sitting in a retreat or when I’m practicing at home ... essentially what you do on the cushion and then it flows on into you hopefully being a bit calmer in your life. But I think what this did was really make the connection between ... well, particularly what Joanna’s work is strong on is ... her PhD thesis was on mutual causality ... what did she say, looking at the interdependence of self and society, and how
one conditions the other. So that made that really clear to me and it also really strengthen my ... it made it clear that, even without taking it into the social or justice or environmental context, practice flowed throughout the whole of life and was not just a thing that you did when you sat down and closed your eyes. And that’s how we are with each other from day to day, obviously as the Buddha said ... but at that point I hadn’t dealt into the Buddhist teachings which I have now but not nearly as much as Isaac. But I had gone to retreats and I had meditated and obviously there were dharma talks but I hadn’t done a lot of reading in Buddhism. That also started to provoke some ... gradually some more dharma study.

Interviewer: It seems like a sort of unification ... if you like. How did that affect the things you did in life from then on?

Abby: Well from there on I started leading Joanna’s work. Interestingly, I know I did continue to do retreats [of Joanna Macy].

Interviewer: Can you tell me the reason why you kept doing them?

Abby: The reason for doing ... it was because I saw that this was a much more sustainable philosophical basis for activism than this duality of us versus them way of doing things that I had been doing before that.

Interviewer: Us versus them as in confrontation of ...

Abby: Yes, you know ... One of the things that Joanna talks about in her workshops is the prophecy that she got from the Tibetans called the Shambhala warrior prophecy. I don’t know if you’ve read it in her works?

Interviewer: I’ve heard of it from Allan Atkisson actually. He uses that from Joanna.

Abby: Yes. In that prophecy ... towards the end there is the line that is quite clear to the Shambhala warriors that the line between good and evil runs right through the landscape of every human heart. So Thich Nhat Hahn says that very beautifully in his poem ‘Please call me by my true name’. And I think that was when I first came across that poem – in one of those workshops. But anyway ... So it becomes clear that you can’t ... whilst one can oppose actions of people like I would oppose the old growth logging that’s going on in New Britain apparently for example, it’s not that the people who are carrying it out are all bad. There may be motivations of self-interest; it’s hard to be a human being and not have motivation. That’s the understanding you know as you gradually come to practice, and you see all the ways in which oneself ... you know, you’re self-interested. So you can’t necessarily blame and perpetuate this culture of shame and blame that we tend to live in and of vilifying other people to that extent. So I think it immediately invites a more compassionate and intelligent way of thinking about activism.
Interviewer: Are you saying that ... I don’t want to put words into your mouth ... but you’re saying that there’s a very fine line within all of us between doing what’s right and what’s not so right. And that through Joanna’s practice that you feel that it’s possible to shift between that fine line or change people.

Abby: Not ... not necessarily but I suppose one becomes much more compassionate about other people’s motivations, is much more willing to enter into dialogue to explore what else motivates people or where their areas of conflictedness are. I mean if you think of people who’ve been logging forests for years and years, their lives have been in forests – they love forests in their own ways you know. So it’s a willingness to enter into dialogue and to explore whilst still not giving up on also wanting to protect and save environments. But it’s kind of like one’s ... instead of holding up both hands and saying, ‘No!’ one does much more of the Buddhist gesture of holding that hand and opening with the other hand so that it’s a gesture of ‘No’ and ‘Let’s see where we can go with this together.’

Interviewer: And have you done that in subsequent activism?

Abby: Um ... Yes, I’ve tried to. Yeah, yeah ... I can't of the top of my head ... Well it’s just a different way ... yeah, trying different things to see what works. So we’ve ... (long pause) ... A recent example would be: I was on the stall – I’ve been working with Rural Australians for Refugees – and a man came up to me quite confrontational and he’d been a guard a Woomera [prison] and he was ... pretty much out there to tell me that all refugees were bad and he knew because he’d worked there. And so, at that point, you recognise where people were at and I thought, “Well, I’m not going to make ... go anywhere by confronting this guy. Nor am I going to convert this guy to the cause. All I can do in this situation is to listen with some compassion to his stories.” I moved my body so I wasn’t standing opposite him and I was more standing next to him. I just asked him to tell me about his experiences and I threw in a few things that might have given him pause for thought and talked about some of the people I knew of and their reasons for coming here. Of course, he didn’t let me do that much but mostly you’re just trying to shift it. So in the end we parted and he hadn't changed his mind and I hadn't changed mine but at least we hadn't had a fight about it [laughs]. And maybe I had given him ... you know, you have to in some cases realise that ... I guess it’s about a much more detached kind of activism too. One has to let go of attachment to results and that’s hard ... particularly when one can see the suffering so clearly. One would love it to end but you can't make people change their minds. They have to come to it for their own reason. And this is about trying a whole variety of skilful means. See what will work, and knowing that one can't necessarily see the results of one’s action. I mean that’s quite clear to me because of running these workshops and retreats that I’m starting now because I’ve been doing it for so long ... to meet people who tell me that that workshop I went to changed my life.

Interviewer: So it’s happening.
Abby: But ... I don’t always know about it.

Interviewer: Interesting.

Abby: We should stop but we can continue later on.

**Part 2 (13 April 05): Informal conversation**

*Abby talks about her husband, Isaac.*

Interviewer: Over the years what changes have there been with Isaac in relation to his Buddhism?

Abby: Umm ... He’s always had an incredibly strong interest in reading about Buddhism – he’s got a huge library in there – but his practice has been sporadic, so has mine been too for that matter because, you know, we had kids and all of that [laughs]. But I went to retreats more regularly than he did although when the kids were at school it was hard to do that. He made a ... some years back and I can’t remember how many now but somewhere in the last ten years he made a really strong commitment to living and practicing Buddhism. He still doesn’t maintain daily practice but he’s much more consciously living his practice I think.

Interviewer: Is he a better man than before?

Abby: Yep [laughs].

Interviewer: You would say that wouldn’t you [laughs].

Abby: Yep [laughs] ... He’s always been a good man. I think generosity has always been one of his really strong qualities and that’s always been so. He’s always been ready to lend a helping hand to people or give something to people if they didn’t already have it, to share his knowledge and I think the way he’s a better man ... I think he’s working very consciously on his tendency to ... well, he just has a short fuse, some people do and that’s how he is. But he is very consciously working on that.

Interviewer: Has he been working on it for a long time?

Abby: Yes [laughs] ... Yes, and he relates that to Right Speech. Anything else?

Interviewer: No.

**Part 2 (13 April 05)**

Interviewer: What is your position on vegetarianism? Both of you are not vegetarians are you?

Abby: No. We used to be for many, many years – all here in the family I guess.
Interviewer: The whole family?

Abby: Yeah our whole family were, the children, everything.

Interviewer: Why was that?

Abby: Well, partly for me I just started to take a dislike of red meat, a natural dislike but then when I went to India and all of that, it was a Buddhist thing about not wanting to take life. But Isaac has always had the attitude that ... partly because of his family of origins as big meat eaters but also the thing about being a monk where you just eat whatever is put in your bowl. Where if we went to somebody’s house I would say, ‘I’m a vegetarian’ and he would eat whatever. And so that’s how he always was. We were vegetarian at home and he’d eat whatever was offered anywhere. And then when my health ... I was a bit sick, six or seven years ago I wasn’t very well and I seem to need more protein in my diet. So now we eat ... I eat chicken or fish. But still not red meat. So it’s a compromise I guess for health reasons. So since that started to happen we now have meat at home.

Interviewer: OK. But generally chicken or fish.

Abby: Generally chicken or fish and that is as far as I’m concerned a pretty arbitrary choice that I don’t actually like red meat that much. Yeah, also I don’t think that raising beef is particularly sustainable. I would prefer to eat free-range chicken and try to get that when I can. I’m not even sure that fish is sustainable these days but ...

Interviewer: Is there anything that is sustainable except organic produce now because vegetables grown with lots of chemicals aren’t any good either.

Abby: No. No. So a few meals a week we have chicken or fish.

Interviewer: So some meals would be vegetarian?

Abby: Oh yes. Still quite a lot of vegetarian meals.

Interviewer: Your kids – have they changed back.

Abby: My son always wanted meat. So the compromise we made with him was same as Isaac: whenever he was anywhere else he could eat meat [laughs] ... but not here. So we allowed them that choice. My daughter does eat meat now. She was much more into being a vegetarian and she’s still more that way than him. But she does eat meat.

Interviewer: Speaking of family, has Buddhism impacted 1) the idea of having children and 2) the way of raising them?
Abby: Um ... Yes but I wouldn’t say I consciously raised my kids as a Buddhist or to be Buddhist. But it was interesting that I was talking to my daughter a couple of days ago and she was talking about some difficulties that she’s having with her ... that her boyfriend’s having. And she was being very complementary saying that ‘I realise that people just ... that it’s so much easier for me the way I’ve been brought up to think, to be and to ... I’m much more aware of my own internal processes and what’s going on for me and much more .... she didn’t use the term reflexive but that’s kind of what she meant ... that’s what happened for her.

Interviewer: But in terms of having children, you’ve got two kids and so I’m assuming that Buddhism didn’t have much impact for you as lay people. Were kids the natural thing to do?

Abby: Yes, that was the natural thing to do. I chose not to do retreats for a number of years because I was working full-time and we only got four weeks holiday a year. And so I would always take holiday to coincide with the kids’ school holidays when they reached school age. So I just didn’t do long retreats in those years ... but that’s alright.

Interviewer: Thanks you for the interview.

Abby: If kids didn’t have kids we’d die out [laughs].

Interviewer: That’s true [laughs].

Abby: Possibly because I didn’t raise my kids to be Buddhists.

Interviewer: I think this may be cultural but for some practicing Buddhists having children becomes less important whereas for many non-Buddhist it tends to be the overriding mission in early life. I don’t know if you agree with that?

Abby: I don’t know is it Buddhist or is it a class thing? I’m not sure. The angst of the middle class. But to me, no, having kids was no ... well, you know, it interferes with practice in one sense but, god, it’s the best opportunity to take your practice into daily life.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s true. So you did that.

Abby: Practicing the paramittas particularly patience [laughs].

Correspondence

E-mail (1 August 2005)
This is the first e-mail in the form of a question and answer. It has been modified because the original e-mail contains confidential information and re-formatted for ease of reading.
What is your daily practice?

I do loving-kindness meditation, and go outside and sit in nature, aware of breath, body, sight and sound. If weather is bad I sit inside with eyes closed – no sight, and with more awareness of mind-states.

Do you adhere by the 5 precepts? If so, how strictly and why?

No stealing, false speech, sexual misconduct and I very rarely drink and don't get drunk. I do kill mosquitoes sometimes – but not while on retreat or when practicing – and I do eat some chicken and fish. Why? I live with more ease, less conflictedness – except about the mosquitoes, chickens and fish.

You mentioned that when you were younger you did not understand what suffering was. What are the things in that you now consider as suffering (in your life, past and present)?

Suffering is any gap between what I want or expect, and what is actually happening – that is if there is any attachment to things being how I want them, and mostly there is some attachment. A friend of mine describes suffering as that moment of 'fatal peril' (as she calls it), that movement of the body-heart-mind, however gross or subtle, that happens when: my expectations are not met; service is denied to me; my authority is defied; or, my image of myself is not re-substantiated. I would say that most peoples' suffering falls into one or more of those categories. Personally I have had most suffering from the last one – to do with self-image. All of them are about clinging to some fixed notion of "I".

E-mail (10 April 06)
Dear Abby,

I've given Isaac my little piece on his life concerning personal sustainability - in other words, what were the key issue(s) in his early life that he had to resolve for life to be sustainable, worthwhile and complete - and what was the role of Buddhism. With yours, I had a little bit more difficulties given the limited time we had. However, I have good ideas but just need you to confirm or elaborate on with these few questions.

1. Were there any suffering, abuse or traumas in your childhood or early adulthood that lead to issues that had to be resolved for life to go on well?

2. If 'No,' very briefly described your childhood?

1 & 2. Well, I guess everyone has some childhood traumas. Mine was around being sent to boarding school at age 6 - even though that was because my parents wanted me to have the best education possible, it felt like being 'cast out of the nest' - and cast into a den of wolves - specifically the bullying by the other
girls - name calling, ostracism etc - girl stuff, not often physical bullying, though sometimes it was. So I guess the issue that had to be resolved was around trusting that I was lovabale. My parents were loving and warm, but unaware of what I was going through, and unwilling to see it. I have 2 younger brothers and a younger sister, and we both had fun together and fought a lot – pretty normal - and now we all like each other.

3. Did that spontaneous spiritual experience as a teenager trigger a deep yearning that there was more to life than what you knew at the time?

3. Yes.  
(Second e-mail immediately following) Second thought re Q3. Spontaneous experience made me certain there was more to life ... but since there was no support for that experience/insight in daily life - until I came across Buddhism/meditation ... it faded to a sort of yearning.

4. Although you said that Goenka gave you "a sense of that happiness was possible" after the first retreat, you never mentioned whether you experience happiness at the retreats? Did you experience happiness or was it something else?

4. Yes happiness - and many other things - all the normal struggle with the monkey mind, of course - but increasingly a deep equanimity and contentment and joyfulness.

5. Where did the passion for social/environmental justice come from?

5. From my father - he was a farmer, but would have been a journalist if WW2 had not intervened - and he was very interested in the world, had a great heart and a strong impulse towards 'fairness' and 'doing the right thing by people'. And from the boarding school experience – the inhumanity and injustice of what I experienced.

6. Your purpose in life is service, but what about enlightenment? It seems that your affinity to Mahayana's Boddhisattva goals are much greater than Theravadan goals. It seems that the 'narrower' Theravadan outlook regarding personal enlightenment never really caught your passion. Please comment.

6. Well, not exactly. Yes, I have caught the passion for 'enlightenment', but having chosen to live this life - at least so far, in family and community - what to do with the other 48 weeks or so per year, when I'm not in retreat? 'Service' is one way to describe what I do, but really my passion is 'living awakening' - and building 'communities of awakening' (that's Stephen Batchelor's phrase). The Engaged Calmness [name changed] retreats are aimed at integrating meditative insights into life, and into the service of all life. The Theravadan emphasis on meditation and 'personal enlightenment' is that a contradiction in terms?) doesn't pay as much attention as it should to the jewel of Sangha.
7. It has been a year now since you went on the 1-month retreat. What has been the impact on yourself and why?

7. It wasn't a month-long retreat - it was a month-long 'intensive' (workshop) with Joanna Macy, focusing much more on her work than on meditation practice - although we did daily meditation and had one day of solitude/silence per week. So not sure if this is relevant to your thesis. I'm trying to remember how long it is since we did the initial interview - probably at least 18 months? In both 2004 and 2005 I attended 9-day retreats, plus a few weekends/days here and there ... mainly in the Burmese 'Mahasi' method (Theravadan). This year I plan to attend a 14-day retreat in August ... and have already done a 5-day retreat in January. Each time I do a retreat, deeper levels of clinging fall away, and the resulting freedom gives me more energy, joy and passion for what I am doing in the world (bearing in mind that each year I get one year older, and don't have as much energy as I'd like!).

Field notes
• See also Field notes in Isaac
• I had heard of Abby the notice boards at university. She had run some courses there as well as elsewhere. I had been interested in going there and had discussed about schedule with her through e-mail.
• Abby greeted me warmly and was pleasant. She had a peaceful feeling about her which was good to see.
• Abby also had somebody who had done the one-month retreat with her staying in the house. She seemed quite busy preparing for more people to come and go. It appeared that many, I assumed Buddhist, friends and practitioners visited or stayed there. I sensed some communal spirit which was not surprising since they lived on communities before.
• I talked with Abby on the porch over tea after I had freshened up in my room. The conversation was light with lots of laughter but on important topic she was deep. She mentioned something about how there is never one cause and that this kind of thinking which she had heard on the radio and is common explanation in the media is nonsensical and simplified. There is no one cause for anything. I enjoyed this insight very much and felt I wish I had been able to record it. I could certainly detect a good deal of seriousness and passion inside. This was good to see but expected for someone who conducted retreats on environment and Buddhism.
• While Isaac, was off to do some stuff I helped Abby make some sandwich lunch for us. We had a pleasant conversation during the preparation in the kitchen where I also asked about Isaac.
• After lunch, I had much less time interviewing Abby because I had spent so much time with Isaac. Plus I was exhausted from the drive and the interview, so much so that I was not much usual self as an interviewer. Things were still swimming in my head and my mind was in a rush. I did not do a good job interview I thought because I felt I interrupted her too much and I treated the whole session more like a conversation or an informal interview. Nevertheless
I felt that there was sufficient data gleaned and that it was useful and the quality acceptable enough mostly. But I would need to do extra work after the trip and in feedback and further communications.

- Abby came with us to the evening meditation session Isaac conducts every week. But she told me that she did not always attend.
- I interviewed briefly again the next day after coming back from a long trip with Isaac to visit his retreat centre that he was building.
- During that part of the day I was feeling rushed, feeling not uneasy by less patience. I felt that during the interview I did not let the story unfold as much as I normally do. It is the feeling that you want a conversation rather than an interview. Partly, this was probably because we had much less time as Isaac was to take me to his meditation session in town soon afterward. Also I was not sure whether this interview would be used.
- Afterward, she mentioned that she wanted to write a book about friendship and that she would conduct interviews with people to provide data for it. She asked me about recording devices that might be appropriate and I suggested a device like mine which was an MP3 player with a good voice recorder. I didn't want her to spend too much money and so I suggest a less expensive model which would be enough for her job.
- I bade farewell and left the house at around 4.30pm because I didn't want to get lost in the dark in that area.
MIA

Conversation over lunch

Part 1 (6 May 2005) – Recorded conversation over lunch

This is the conversation over lunch before the formal interview. It is presented in note format with significant parts in quotations.

Interviewer: So you were in this blockade and then you decided that you had to go on your spiritual path?
• Was arrested in New South Wales for trespassing a property during a blockade against cutting old growth forest but was fortunate not to be charged because of confusion over demarcation of property.
• “As I was walking back from this it struck me that I wasn’t actually, by stopping the blockade and by being a vegetarian and vegan and, you know, by trying to change the world and what they [the loggers] were doing, it wasn’t changing anything. And I was still really angry and so I thought I need to go on my own pilgrimage - I need to find out what the other side of it is, you know. Because I didn’t know. I just had a sense of it when I met this old lama: His Eminence Chogye Trinchon Rimpoche from Nepal – Tibetan Buddhism.”

Interviewer: This is the old Lama?
• Yes. First saw him doing medicine dharma and loved it “although I had no idea what he was doing but I felt a clarity.”

Interviewer: Where was this?
• In Wakefield [fictional name]

Interviewer: And you met him before?
• No, not personally but attended the public talk and ceremony (Medicine Buddha)
• “I didn’t feel like a Buddhist at that point but I felt fascinated by this sense of serenity and peace and awareness he had. And then the Dalai Lama spoke on my first ever mother’s day. And I went to see him in the park in Thomasville [fictional city name].”
• Mia then asked whether the interviewer went to that occasion in Thomasville.

Interviewer: No, I wasn’t here but I’ve heard of that tour that he did.
• “And it was wonderful! It was amazing! I felt that he was the nicest person in the whole world! I was convinced that this ... there was no ego present, you know. There was kindness and I felt ... I felt ... just total, absolute kindness and love from this being.”
• “So I thought, once I got arrested and spat on by this old drunk man, I thought, ‘Well OK, I might just sort of find out what’s going on, really deeply.’”
• So she went to India to find the old lama she had seen in Thomasville.
• In India, she went to a Hindu ritual that attracted 12 million people. It involved bathing and other ceremonies. Then travelled around and had an “amazing 3 months”.
• Then her son who was 6 years old started wearing all yellow and beads around his neck. He was saying he was Shiva.

Interviewer: So before he went was he a regular Australian boy?
• “Well, I thought so.”
• Her son started displaying very bizarre behaviour e.g. doing meditation. (She showed me photographs of the trip including of her son)
• Was told by the owner of a large ashram that he wanted to give the ashram to her son. The owner said that her 6-year-old son was a saint.
• But her son, who took all this in his stride, refused: “Yes, he was sitting there in the middle of it all and said, “Oh, Gurgi [the owner] no, no. I’m not going to stay here now and take your ashram” and he says, “Why?” And he said, “Ah because I’m going to go up in India further and I’m going to become a Buddhist.” Like, I mean, we’d never ... this was bizarre because there had been no talk of becoming a Buddhist until this point.”

Interviewer: Because they were all Hindus, right?
• Yes, all Hindus and Hindu rituals that they had been involved in.
• But her son stood firm and said that he was going to become a Buddhist and then go up to Nepal. This had never been discussed. But they went to Nepal and found the old lama who she had seen earlier performing the medicine Buddha ceremony.
• Her son also said to the ashram owner that after Nepal he was going to travel the world, be in a rock and roll band, be in the jungle on his own, and then come back and run the ashram. He then accepted the offer while his mother was in a state of total surprise and amazement at the whole situation. However, Mia was freaked by this and wanted to get out as soon as possible.
• Later on, her son wanted to dress like Krishna [the Hindu god] and said, “I was every spiritual being that was ever born.” This was getting very strange.
• They then went to Dharamsala [in northern India] where the Dalai Lama lives. On arrival, her son became convinced that he was a Buddhist monk. Several strange incidents occurred e.g. on seeing a picture of the former Dalai Lama’s palace in Nepal, he spoke of having run up and down what looked like sheer rock face (presumably in his last life). Later on, Mia was told to her surprise that there was actually stairs going up and down. “So Ian knew that there were steps there and he used to run up and down. Slowly I started thinking, “Well, how did he know that?” He was so sure because he was so animated when he was saying ‘I used to run up and down.’”
• So she managed to get an interview with one of the high lamas. To explain this, she was told: “He’s obviously got very high karma in the dharma and he’s clearly a lovely being and, you know, you’ve got to keep him clean, you’ve got to do this but he’s not ready to be named. If he’s a lama he’ll come to it later on.”
• Mia started to study Buddhism (first out of concern that her son was going to be taken away by the lamas). This was how she found the experience: “So I
started to study. And the more I studied Buddhism the more ... It was strange; it wasn’t like I was learning new things. It was like I was deeply supporting my very being. It was like, when I was learning these ... the deep non-violence and the deep respect and compassion and wisdom and this being a foundation for life. Just everything, everything was like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah’ ... like totally resonated with me. So that is how I got into Buddhism.”

Interviewer: Before, what was your training in? Were you an environmental activist?
• Yes

Interviewer: Did you work before as well?
• Worked for 10-15 years in the disability area. This work concerning care
• Studied a lot on the Kabbalah (the Jewish system of thought)

Interviewer: So you were working in the disability area and were an activist as well?
• Not then
• First went to university and studied fine art (sculpture). But dropped out because “[I] couldn’t stand it. It was like totally, you know ... And I hated ... I couldn’t relate to anyone there. I couldn’t relate to my family or anything there.”
• Then travelled around Europe for a year
• On coming back, went to Newmoore where met a teacher of the Kabbalah. She then started studying it seriously. This took her to philosophical studies such as the works of Krishnamurti. During that time she did a variety of temporary jobs e.g. working in fish and chips shop and pizza shop.

Interviewer: It seems like you were looking for something but didn’t know what it was. Is that right?
• “I wanted to add to society but I didn’t think that just having a job, and I didn’t have much status ... I didn’t have much belief in just having a job and just sitting down, having a free weekend where you play Playstation. It just was not going to happen like that for me.”

Interviewer: Has that been in you since you were a child.
• “Yes, I’ve always questioned really deeply which has annoyed my family profoundly. It still does. They just call me ‘the intense one.’”
• She gives an example of not conforming and causing tension: “When I stopped drinking alcohol when I was 22 or 23, my mother would say to me in the afternoon when she was pouring everyone a glass of wine on weekends or whatever, ‘Are you having a glass of wine?’ and I’d say, ‘Ah, no thanks’ and they’d say, ‘What’s wrong? Are you sick?’ And I’d be, like, I just don’t want to be not conscious any more. I don’t want to be not aware. I like being aware. And they were like, ‘Ah.’ They didn’t even like me talking like that.”

Interviewer: That’s quite a strange thing to do. What lead you to giving up?
• “I didn’t really like my ego and my pride when I was drinking. I was already full-on enough when I wasn’t drinking. It just became really loud and overbearing. My family drinks a lot. My mother was heavily into alcohol and so was everyone.”

Interviewer: Where did you grow up in?
• Country Jacksonland
• Remembered being in a pub and finding the behaviour of adults drinking and socialising strange and inappropriate: “I remembered sitting staring out the window and thinking, ‘Don’t worry. It’s not going to be always like this. This will pass. And I’d be looking at them and thinking ‘Where are all the other people?’ I remembered having this really strong thought, ‘Where are the others? Where are the people who don’t do these sorts of things?’ I was really aware that there was a different set of people that weren’t behaving like this, you know. And they were flirting with each other and doing all this stuff and I found it really disturbing. Very disturbing. So any way that was very dangerous to their way of life.”

Interviewer: What you did?
• “Yes, because I was seeing from innocent eyes as a child and looking at what they were doing and how they’d be flirting with each other’s partner and stuff like that. I’d look at them and if they looked at me that was dangerous because they didn’t want to be exposed to what they were doing. They wanted to have a good time and not be bothered by somebody who was seeing something quite clearly.”

Interviewer: They wanted to pretend that everything was alright. Everything was fine in what they were doing.
• “So, I suppose, I learnt many methods to try and shut myself up, to stop seeing the way I did.”

Interviewer: You did?
• “Yes, lots of methods ... eating is one of them ... to stop seeing things and, of course, wanting to do something about it. They’re co-dependent I think.”

Interviewer: So you learnt those fairly dangerous habits.
• “Yes, very dangerous, very sad.”
• During the Indian trip, Mia and her son went to Dharamsala and attended a big prayer ceremony conducted by the Dalai Lama to generate love and compassion to the whole world. This impressed her greatly and was fascinated by the kind of leadership the Dalai Lama provided:
  “And the Dalai Lama ... this week we’d arrived ... was holding a hundred million ‘Om mani padme hum’ time where everybody gets together and does ‘Om mani pani hum’ until they did a hundred million, and during the ritual it’s generating love and compassion throughout the world and within ourselves. I thought, ‘Wow! What a spectacular idea! What an amazing idea! How many people will get together and do that and what is this political spiritual leader of
a country leading this sort of thing. I mean what is this all about? I had to go and see.”

• Ian was dressed like a monk, had shaved his head and fitted perfectly with the real monks there. She, who was not a Buddhist then, did not consider her son a monk but he certainly did: “He knew he was a monk. He knew he was a monk.” She showed pictures of how monks her son found who told her that he was a monk.

• On allowing her son to dress like a monk, she says, “I had to. There was no holding him back ... He knew how to do prostration. I didn’t know what the boards were for. I said, ‘What do you think the boards are for?’ He said, ‘I’ll show you and just got up and did prostrations. We’d never been there before! We had never seen a board!’”

Interviewer: Were you a little bit surprised?

• “I was always surprised. I was constantly surprised in India.”

• At the big prayer ceremony, the Dalai Lama, a very large number of monks and Tibetan lay people and a few Westerners were gathered in a large area. Mia shared tea and bread with other lay Tibetans even though she did not speak the language. This sense of sharing and the Tibetan culture impressed her greatly compared to country Maryland: “So the monks parted and he [Ian] went in and then there’re all these old Tibetan people sitting ... His Holiness is sitting here ... There is a just a sea of monks sitting around, all the high lamas in the middle part. It’s a very big place and then all around the outside were the Tibetans and a couple of Westerners. One old lady just waved me over and slaps the seat beside here and I sat down and I’m sort of feeling this amazing sense of feeling, like, ‘This is familiar.’ And she sort of did this and I’m sort of thinking, ‘Do I want a drink?’ and she pulled out a cup and I sort of said, ‘I don’t have a cup.’ And so she pulls out a cup from her bag and she lifts up the skirt and cleaned it out. I was going like, ‘Oh, bloody hell!’ and then she gave me this cup. Then she’s waving at someone over there and this monk came over with this big pot of tea and poured me this butter tea which was just amazing, hard to get used to but I did. And then she slapped this old bloke on the back in front of her. He pulled open his jacket and pulled this round bread out of his jacket pocket and sort of brushed it off, and passed it to me, you know. And I was sitting there going ‘Where have you been? Like really, where have you been? Where are the people sitting around sharing and looking after each other and praying together?’ I have been in this really weird world. But this is what I knew, you know. I really had this sense of, like, I knew this could be here. I knew that people like this existed. They weren’t going to be the ones that I was with. The ones I was with were lost, really badly, dangerously lost.”

Interviewer: You mean your family in the town there?

• “Yes, and the people I knew, that I was born in.”

Interviewer: Friends?

• “Yeh, sort of ... No, I didn’t have many friends growing up. Anyway that was wonderful and Ian fitted in like anything. So that was a very big cultural
experience for me. Also going to Thailand where the Buddhists were so nice. And the temples were so nice. It was so lovely.”

- So she started studying Buddhism: “So then I started studying. I thought this is something I know. I know this to be true ... like, ‘Yep. I’m here and I know this part but what are they studying? What is Buddhism?’ So I started to study.”

- And then she met her lama [teacher] in India.

- Summary of chronology of events from the activism against logging leading to Buddhism: “When I got arrested, that was before India. That’s why I went to India ... because I had to go on a spiritual pilgrimage because it wasn’t working here. There was something I didn’t have to affect change. It was something I couldn’t see. I could feel it but I couldn’t see ... it, anything about it.”

- At the Dalai Lama’s monastery in Dharamsala they met the abbot. Incredibly and again, Ian was familiar with the labyrinth of passages within the monastery. On meeting the abbot they were incredibly impressed by him: “As soon as I sat down in front of him, I just thought, ‘I never ever want to leave your sight ever. I just felt like ... you’re just ... like the first time I’ve ever felt real, or something I don’t know. I loved him so much. It was like I’d always loved him and I will always love him sort of feeling – very strong.”

- The abbot told her to go to Nepal despite her hesitancy to leave him. So they went to Nepal and found the old lama who she first laid eyes on and had been so taken aback in Kenwood. The old lama wanted and got to interview Ian and told Mia that her son was very auspicious and had a very precious life. However, the old lama told her that he was not the one to name him – it was usually the job of the heads of 3 major lineages of Tibetan monks (the head of one of lineages is the Dalai Lama). He had only ever named one person and that was, to Mia’s amazement, the monk who she had just found in the Dalai Lama’s monastery in India. She recalls her astonishment: “And I said ‘What?’ Because that was the one I’d just found. So the two lamas, one I had met in Australia and one I’d met at the Dalai Lama’s monastery, were actually guru and disciple ... How, out of all the monks and lamas in the whole world I've found two and you're both guru and disciple. It was really amazing. That was really amazing for me. So I was sort of thinking, ‘Well, something so beyond what I can see and what I can fathom is happening here.’ But it felt so good, you know. It felt so peaceful and harmonious in my heart.”

- Meanwhile Ian was very happy being there. As example, he would walk around the streets and tidy up the dress of passing monks if they looked scruffy. And the monks would absolutely respect him. She recalled humorously but regarded it as “really weird”.

- “When the Dalai Lama met him [Ian], he went ‘Ha’ like this and he took Ian’s hands and he laid them on his head. It was really bizarre; I was watching and thinking ‘Oh, what is he doing?’”

Interviewer: Where was that?

- In Dharamsala when the Dalai Lama gave a public interview and thousands of people lined up to shake his hands.
• She felt amazed and intrigued that the Dalai Lama would do that sort of thing to her son but not to other people.
• But it was in Nepal that she became a Buddhist by taking refuge with His Eminence Chogye Trinchen Rimpoche. “Then we went to Nepal, found His Eminence Chogye Trinchen Rimpoche and that’s when I became a Buddhist. I took refuge with him. And he gave me my Tibetan name and Ian’s Tibetan name, and I really fully knew I was a Buddhist then. I knew I’d always been a Buddhist and I was a Buddhist thoroughly. I was just like all the other Buddhists and it didn’t matter to me culturally. I just made sense. I really dug the rituals. I understood what Buddha was saying deeply. I knew it was right and not because it was Buddha a religion, it was what he said was correct. In my heart, what he said, what Buddha taught was just speaking the truth. It wasn’t about some doctrine. It wasn’t ... he ... to me Buddha doesn’t talk a doctrine at all; he’s just saying ‘Ah, well it’s like this. This is what I see. This is what I feel.’ And what he sees and feels I know to be correct. You know? So that is my own personal – how I became a Buddhist.”

Interviewer: I guess that was the formal part that you took the refuge. Did you know in your heart before?
• “Yes because I wanted to then go into the ritual and take the initiation and make it the major part of my life ... which it had already become. I was already meditating. I was already getting up at 5.30 in India. Once I met the dharma I wanted to, it was the only time I could get up without Ian and sort of sit down, go through the prayers and sort of think about you know ‘Why is it compassion and wisdom? What is wisdom? What is compassion? What is this and what is that? What do they mean when this is ...’ So I would just think about it all.”

Interviewer: So you started meditating and getting up at 5.30 after you met the dharma which was exactly when?
• It was 8 years ago in India after meeting the lamas
• “And then everything ... everything was about it [dharma] for me. Because I figured that until I worked this stuff out I wasn’t going to be functioning. Because I wasn’t functional in our society, not really. ‘Cause I couldn’t just go off and get a job and be sort of happy. I couldn’t just go off, get a job, keep a marriage together, keep a house together, all those things. I mean I could do them; I’m physically and emotionally and intellectually capable of doing those things. I mean I have a house, you know. I don’t care. I don’t care about this house more than I care about my pair of shoes. Do you know what I mean. Like, it’s not important to me. I like to keep it clean and neat but I don’t care. And that seemed to be a dysfunction in society, you see – from what I was told. So I realised that until I really understood Buddhism I needed to get that together, to know how to function in a society that I find repulsive. And I knew I was going to have to come back here because my lama said, ‘You have to go back’ and I went, ‘No, no!!!’ and he said, ‘Yes.’”

Interviewer: Sorry what was his name again?
• Jhado Tulku, who is the younger of the lamas. He is her heart lama.
• She then shows pictures of the lamas.
• Jhado Tulku is the one who she met in Nepal at the Dalai Lama’s monastery and who sent her to Nepal. In Nepal, it was His Eminence Chogye Trinchon Rimpoché.
• While in Nepal she met another monk unrelated to the other monks. They got on very well and he taught her Buddhism and challenged her intellectually on the subject. She enjoyed the intense sessions working with him.

Interviewer: So he was shaking you up?
• “Yes, he was making me think. He was challenging everything. He was great like this.”

Interviewer: That’s very interesting. You don’t usually get challenged the way you think in normal society.
• “And then, you know, you have to deal with your ego. And then you get to see your ego. And then you think ‘Ah ha! I’ve found it!’ and he taught me a lot about that. So he and I became very good friends. Well, not very good friends because you don’t become very good friends with male monks, not really. But, you know, to a certain … on a spiritual level, we were friends. We were, like, very familiar on a spiritual level.”
• In summary, during the trip in India, she had made connections with 3 lamas in different places.
• On the next trip to India she visited Jhado Tulku and, to her surprise, the other lama who had taught her Buddhism answered the door: “I can’t believe it, really. I said, “The one I took refuge with is his guru. And this one you, who taught me and became my friend, he is your guru. Like what are the chances of that with all of the monks and the Buddhists in the world. How is that? Bizarre! That’s bizarre, don’t you think? It’s not a small coincidence is it? It was major in my mine. I was like ‘Wow! How can that be?’ you know. Then I had to accept. I had to accept that this was truly my path. When he opened the door I was just like ‘Right! This is not ordinary stuff.’”
• “Three completely different spiritual places in the world, I found three spiritual teachers and of all of the Tibetan lamas, teachers and monks, those three are guru, disciple, guru, disciple of the close, the first disciple. His first disciple is him. His first disciple is him. And I took refuge with him; he was my heart lama, and he was my teacher. So it was like … hundreds of miles apart. That for me was an amazing sign. You know, another sign that I was in the right place at the right time doing the right thing.”

Interview

Part 1 (6 May 2005)

This is the formal interview with full transcription.

Interviewer: Has Buddhism changed your life?
Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: May be you could explain it in a more general way about your life at present and how Buddhism has changed that.

Mia: I think the most profound ... well ... yeah, possibly the most profound but definitely the first thing that came into my mind, is that Buddhism gave me a way to look at ... I want to say that I'm not as angry as I used to be, and that's not from some amazing miracle of meeting Buddhism. It just gave me a structure of understanding why I was angry, and how not to be angry. Because it's not just psychological, it incorporates faith [and] it incorporates interconnectedness: how the function of mind works, how when we experience something, how it goes into a feeling which triggers an emotion which triggers an action which creates karma. And when karma is returning, how that can trigger off those seeds. I mean it is so complex, Buddhism, but it makes so much sense. So the more I studied and looked into what Buddha taught about the 84,000 afflictions ... he talked about, I think, the 84,000 afflictions that the human mind can get caught up into. And the more I studied them and pieced them together, how it all, you know, dependent arising, how things affect another thing and how it's all connected together. And when I ... just, I saw very clearly that everything was suffering. I had already seen that very clearly when I was younger. So this was not [just] saying that, yes, everything was suffering; it was saying but we can stop it. And so Buddhism to me is a map. It's a map of how to stop it. You know, it's a guide. It's a user's tool [laughs]. It's like a computer and it's like you can write while you've got this going on and this here and you're angry, and you think it's the object that you're angry at but it's actually that ... that object doesn't have an inherent quality that makes everybody angry toward it. [Rather,] that's your mind that's having an angry reaction to that object. Why? You know. And so when I could piece it out like that, I got to see things clearly, more clearly. I got to put them down and say, 'Oh wow, look at that. I'm reacting at that.' So, for me, it's the most useable tool.

Interviewer: So are you saying that you are less angry?

Mia: Yep. Definitely.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of, let's say, in a situation where you would feel angry, when somebody annoys you or something. What happens and how is this related to Buddhism?

Mia: Is this before or now?

Interviewer: You can compare it.

Mia: Let me think. Gosh, just about anything made me angry before. I didn't know necessarily that I was an angry person before. It was a very smouldering underneath anger, and sometime an explosive anger but more of a constant state of anger.
Mia: Just ... I'm an angry person no matter what the world did I got angry at it. It was a bit more like that, although that might not be quite the case with everything but with a lot of things. Um ... If somebody drove out in front of me ... like they cut me off or came out of a driveway and cut me off and they were obviously cutting it too close to being in my car, I would get so angry that I would drive very close to that car and be tooting, 'Wahhhhh!' [loud, intensely aggravated tone] you know. If they stopped I would probably want to get out and have a fight - not that I've ever did that - but I would want to, you know. I would get very angry at that situation. So, since meeting Buddhism, Buddha was sort of saying, 'Well, everything is not the way you think it is.' ... You think, when you're caught up in that anger, you impute on that situation that they did that to annoy you, [and that] they did it on purpose. It's all about you. It's all about you, you know ... but he was saying that none of it is about you. I got to undo it and look at ... that person ... the way things, what I understood the way things don't necessarily exist the way they do when you're in a state of anger was that you're attached and you're so in a deluded state that you impute on a situation something that might not be the case. But in a rage of anger you don't stop to think.... Whereas when I started practicing a compassion for all sentient beings and seeing them as my mother and exchanging myself for them and doing things like practicing ... alright, a car pulls out - now what might be happening? They might be having a dog that has been hit by a car in the backseat and they're just driving. Or they might be ... just split up with their partner and they're out of their body. Or they might not have seen me. Or maybe they're real assholes and they don't give a shit, and if that's the case then it's very sad that they don't care. And I developed compassion for their situation rather than just, 'You affected me in a bad way and so I hate you.'

Interviewer: Now, if you go out and the car cuts you up what would you do?

Mia: Um ... well, it happens much less frequently bizarrely enough. And more often than not I'd catch myself thinking ... I'm in the moment a little bit ... a lot more now in the present moment and I can sometime get a sense of what's happening for people I feel. So if somebody cuts me off, sometime I'll look in the car and I just get this moment where I would think ... and I'd look and it would be a woman, say, she's got 3 kids in the car and she's yelling at a couple of them. You know, I'll think, 'The poor thing. She's beside herself. She's so distracted. She shouldn't be driving. Just at the moment. She should settle down. She's going to hurt herself and the kids driving like that.' So I'm having much more thought around about concern. The others aren't ... their actions aren't just out to get me. People are now beings that I feel more compassion and more connection with. And they've got their own lives. They've got their own things going on and they're also a result of my karma. You know, sometime people do inconsiderate or nasty things towards me, I don't necessarily get angry at them any more because I think, 'That's interesting that that's happening.' You know, I just don't see things as automatically bad and get irritated because I have dealt with the anger a lot more. And so instead I'm seeing things more like, 'Well, it's interesting
that that would happen because I’ve created the causes for everything that’s happened.’ I mean that is cause and effect and that’s really the law of karma. So it’s interesting that that’s happened. And for me to get angry at them brings back my karma, really. I should be angry at me for creating the cause of the karma in the first place. So that has helped me be more in the moment. I think I’m more in the moment. When I’m more in the moment which I wasn’t in the moment – I was always off with my thoughts and I had so much extra baggage of being a victim and being hurt and stuff.

Interviewer: So it seems like you have more clarity about your situation. Like you told me about the people in the car and you get a sense of the situation.

Mia: Yes, that’s right. So it’s more of reality, I think. Rather than what I’m projecting on reality ... from anger. So they had nothing to do with my anger – that’s what I discovered. Just because my son is cranky and throws his bag around when he gets home has nothing to do with the fact that I’m an angry person. Do you know what I mean? Because in a good mood I may say, ‘Hey Ian, what’s wrong? Pick up your bag, mate,’ you know. And in a bad mood, if I allow my anger to come up I’d say, ‘Oi!’ [in loud, angry tone]. The anger’s mine. Like it has nothing to do with the phenomena and people cannot make me angry. I’ve found that.

Interviewer: Did you find that?

Mia: Yes, I found that in Buddhism because of the wisdom of Buddhist understanding of the lack of inherent existence of phenomena and people.

Interviewer: Did you find that in your own experience?

Mia: Well, once I studied Buddhism I found it and meditated on it then. I take it back to my bedroom and I sit down on my gompa [usually meaning Tibetan monastery] and I just meditated on it. And I think, ‘Why should ... why, once I discovered that people driving in front of me, they’re in their world ... well, why did the Buddha always talk about compassion and wisdom being the two wings of a bird? Why?’ And then when I realised it. I thought, ‘Well, firstly have compassion that you created the causes for them to bring back your karma. But the other thing is they’re suffering. They’re suffering just like me. I might have been irritated because my car was there and they nearly hit me. Maybe they’re thinking, ‘Ah, piss off!’ Maybe they’re angry. Maybe they’re so distracted and angry at their children that they nearly killed them. You know, I started to feel this amazing sense of compassion and connectedness with people. And that, of course, feeds me thinking, ‘Well, what’s the other thing? I’ve got pride. And I’ve got this and I’ve got that.’ And I find them. I see them arise when I go into a state of reaction. It’s anything if my heartbeat goes up or it starts to sweat or I get hot or I get shaky or I get these signs of ‘Arrrgh ...’ happening. So I think, ‘Ah-ha, they’re all the signs of attachment affecting emotions.’ So I go back and sit in my room and I lay them down and go, ‘OK, well what happened?’ So I’ve got this map, you see. I’ve got
this map of understanding, ‘Well, this was karmic influence. This was the feeling I got,’ and then I can look at it. To me, it’s an amazing structure.

Interviewer: I think Tibetan Buddhism in particular has a very detailed map of karma and what happens.

Mia: Absolutely. Absolutely, hugely complex. It’s as complex as your mind wants to go.

Interviewer: Tibetan Buddhism has such a long rich tradition.

Mia: It’s very helpful to me because I’m so intellectual. Like, you know, I intellectualise on everything. So it is very, very suited to my mind.

Interviewer: And let’s say with that anger that you say has gone much better or you have a better handle on it, what has it done for your life?

Mia: Well, I have a much better relationship with my son. Much, much better. I don’t feel as isolated from society. I went to study, finally ... you know, like I was afraid of studying because I think anger is also a reaction which can be based in fear. And it’s sort of like dizzy ‘urrurr’-like energy. When I really look at my anger, it’s really not based on its own thing. It’s not its own thing; it’s a result of something. Often it can be fear or attachment or a fear of something. That’s what I found mine to be. So the more I dealt with it and the more I didn’t make people the ‘them’ and there was just me ... and that’s what my lama says to me – he is very skilful – he said, ‘You’ve done all this study now, I want you to go back to the West, and I want you to get a job with people and practice compassion.’

Interviewer: I am right in saying that you were hesitant to study, to go to university, before because you view those people as them or institution as nasty, arrogant or whatever. Is that right?

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: And now do you see them differently?

Mia: A lot of it. I mean a lot of Western culture I still don’t think is very geared towards the best principles ... I don’t think they’ve got the best in mind for people. Like, in some sense of businesses like: ‘Ah well, sorry you lost your job mate but that’s business. We’re out for the buck.’ Like that whole sort of mentality that is studied and taught, I don’t like it and I don’t think it is beneficial to anyone on any level. And I think the Buddha taught that too, you know. It’s like if you practice that sort of thing that’s what you’ll get it right back. It’s not good any ... So, on some levels, I’m no longer emotionally engaged with it; I just see it and know why I’m not attracted to it. So I think it’s such a wonderful thing to actually ... ‘cause Buddhism has helped lay it down without the passion, really. And just say, ‘Well, it’s like this because people do this and then, if they behave like this towards people, then this will come back. And then they’ll be feeling like this because this
is coming back. But if you stop behaving like that they you won’t be creating the causes for that in the future.’ It’s so simple.

Interviewer: So you understand the causes and effects?

Mia: Well, to a certain extent.

Interviewer: Yes, to a certain extent. But also you’re not caught up in the passion. I mean the passion is still there – I can see it.

Mia: It’s getting less anyway, you know. Like I’m not ferociously angry at everything now. I understand it more. I understand why people hurt each other now. Before it would send me into absolute distraught when I see wars and stuff. And now I sort of think, ‘Ah, these people are creating all these causes because they believe so much in something and they don’t see the bigger picture and they don’t see the results are killing them: car-bombing each other and going into other people’s countries and shooting people.’ You know, they have no idea of the terrible lifetimes ahead of them. Really! Actually, I feel more compassion than anger now. I really do. You know, I feel absolutely devastated when I watch the news now. I just think, ‘Oh, gosh!’ Whereas before, I would get angry at them, ‘What are they f****** doing? Ah!’ and I was out there doing blockades, ‘No, you’re not chopping the trees. We need air! We need rivers! Hello, wake up!’ To me, it was so obvious. What is everyone else thinking about. Why isn’t everyone seeing things the way I do. Whereas I don’t think much of that has changed – I still like organic food, I like fruits and vegetables, I don’t like to eat animals, it’s always been like that to me, kind of obvious for me – but I’m not upset with people who don’t do the things I way I do because, now, I understand why they’re doing the things the way they do. And Buddhism is solely responsible for me learning how to see that and not be angry any more.

Interviewer: OK. And your son, you said the relationship was better.

Mia: Much better.

Interviewer: In what way?

Mia: Well, I don’t suddenly burst into rage or get angry.

Interviewer: And you did before?

Mia: Yeah. Yes. Yes. [quiet voice and demeanour in contrast to previous flamboyance]

Interviewer: OK

Mia: Like now ... like last night I said, ‘Do your homework.’ He said, ‘Oh, I don’t want to do my homework.’ I said, ‘Can you just put some of the dishes away,’ and [he said,] ‘Oh, I don’t want to,’ and put the television on. I said, ‘Ian, come
on,’ and then he said something a bit rude to me ... no, not rude just something in a bad tone, and I went, ‘Rrrrgghhh! Turn off ...’ But it was completely controlled and I was loving him completely the whole time I was doing it. Whereas before, I was so isolated in my self-grasping and self-cherishing that I would see it as he’s challenging my authority and he’s stepping out of line. And it would be ... angry. My anger would come out; it would find all these justifications to be angry. And it wouldn’t be about Ian getting back on track. Because he’d been out playing for two hours after school and it was time to get some homework and a few things done, it was getting dark and I was getting dinner ready. You know, he had to do it but he just didn’t want to. I understand his mind that doesn’t want to. But being angry with him isn’t a very nice to get him on track because then he goes into a state of anger himself. So, now, instead of yelling at him because he’s insulting me, it’s more about a ‘Heah! Pull up. You know these things have to be done. And you know it will be too late when you get into bed ...’ And he was completely fine. He said, ‘OK mum.’ He went and had a shower – cooled down in the shower and came back in. After a little while he came and put his arms around me. We didn’t sort of make up after it because it was more a little adjustment. Where before, when he was younger, if I got angry with him, I’d be in tears by the end of the night because something would be wrong. It would feel bad, you know. It feels really bad to be an angry person. And you don’t want to hurt the people you love. But you do hurt them in the time you’re angry because you’re angry with them. That’s not a positive emotion at all.

Interviewer: What do you attribute this lessened anger to?

Mia: It’s definitely understanding as well ... the way it affects him when I’m angry. When I started to really break out of my kind of mind that was all about me, and then I looked at how I affect him and that we are interconnected ... I mean Buddha said that we’re interconnected with everything. It’s all dependent arising. When I started really looking into how are we connected and how does it affect him and sometime I’d catch myself mid anger or whatever, and I’d see him going, ‘Oh ... [weak voice]’ and he’d be closing down, I’d go, ‘No! I love you so much. I don’t want to do this. Ah!’ It was awful. It was terrible. It was really hard work. I mean Buddhism isn’t some kind of ... like, turn the tape on and you’ve got it. Like it’s hard work every minute. Hard work ... for me it has been. And sometimes you just would ... I can understand why some people would just want to go out and drink and not think about it because it’s such hard work.

Interviewer: So it seems that you catch yourself sometime, right, being angry. And that seems to trigger some understanding that you had already. Would I be correct?

Mia: Yeah, well, what I studied is that anger is a result of harbouring angry thoughts and having the mind that supports anger. And so when you look at that, like, ‘Where is that mind? Where does it stay? Where does it live? In the chest? In the head? Where?’ - you can’t find it. So what is it the result of? It is the result of ignorance and attachment. What am I attached to? What is the ignorance? You see, Buddha has got this row of questions that you can ... So you go deeper
and deeper into thinking about them and you come up with, ‘Well, there’s nothing there! Is only mind. It’s a concept. How do I keep that concept in place? Well by supporting it and habitualising this behaviour.’ So then I have all the information there to undo it. But I need the motivation to do that. And the motivation is I love my son. I love my society. I love people and I don’t want to hurt anyone. In fact, to be perfectly honest, I much rather be benefiting people. So that was the motivation that sort of pulled me out of this habituating anger. So it was the hard work of keep remembering what is angry. It’s like a cloud passing through the sky. You think you’re the cloud for a minute but it’s just passing through. So all of that looking at it like this and processing it like that, that eventually became the way I trained my mind to no longer get angry.

Interviewer: Do you know why you’ve been so angry?

Mia: Yeah. I think so. My father was a very violent man. He used to whip us with belts and kick, you know, kick us across the room and beat us. We were pretty well beaten as kids. And, you know, I’ve done some therapy on a lot of this. There’ll be pain in here or something, and my type of therapy is I’d move into there and I’d be a little girl held down and whipped by my dad with a big belt at the age of three thinking, ‘I’m bad.’ You know, ‘I’m bad,’ because he’s saying, ‘You’re bad! Bad!’ I can hear him just angry, and then that is what I’ve learnt in a lot of ways. So that’s what happened to all of us. I don’t think it just happened to me. I know that all of my brothers and sisters talk about different violent episodes they remember. Sometime they ring me and say, ‘Ah, the day he kicked me across the room I hit the wall and I was about two,’ and I said, ‘Yeah.’ And then they can talk about it and stuff like that. He grabbed people by the head and whacked their head against the wall and stuff ...

Interviewer: That hurts when you’re a kid psychologically.

Mia: Ah, on many levels ... it’s so destructive, and one of the worse levels is that you want your dad to love you. And you feel very unlovable at that point especially with stuff he would say about: ‘This is your fault that I’m doing it.’ It was never about his stuff, you see. So to start to think you’re inherently bad. ‘I am inherently ...’ I mean, I think I have ... I’ve done a lot of therapy ... not a lot of therapy, actually haven’t done a lot of therapy. I am currently, while I’m studying, doing some therapy – what I love. It is so messed up. But through my study in Buddhism I’ve got to see this stuff about myself any way. Because when you go back and back and think, ‘What is this?’ And I think, ‘Well actually ...’ and if you touch the feeling that is deep behind an emotion and you sort of let it be there and you allow yourself to be present when you think, it’s like I’m a child and I think I’m really bad because I’ve caused my parents suffering. And then you think, ‘There’s something not right about this.’

Interviewer: So you said you did some therapy i.e. you went to a therapist.

Mia: No. I tried to when I was younger because I was going a bit mad. Ah ... no.
Interviewer: So you do therapy on your own?

Mia: Yes, through Buddhism.

Interviewer: I suppose ...

Mia: And during studying last year some of the students we worked on each other as well. So there I got to do some stuff. And also the dean I went and saw her as a patient, a paying client a couple of times which was great.

Interviewer: Can I ask you, were you brought up as a Catholic?

Mia: Yep. Does it show? [laughs]

Interviewer: No, but some Catholics have these sorts of pain. I’m sure not only Catholics but it seems to be common. So are you dealing with these past experiences?

Mia: For example, another way Buddhism has helped me deal with anger was when two times ago I went home to visit my dad. This is going to be really horrible but this is the truth, this is what happened. The first night I saw my father we were at a restaurant and he had too much to drink and ended up telling to me to f*** off, f*** off [vicious tone], you know. Really ah! Sorry, but that is quoting what he actually said. And when I came back into my therapeautic situation to work with this, I wasn’t getting any ... I couldn’t remove this terror and this anger that was in my chest. Like it was taking over me, all the sadness and this ‘Oh ...’ you know. How can this meant to be; I’m 38 years old. Like he’s ... and it was so irrational! It was so irrational ... why he did it! It doesn’t matter why he did it. The point is: I learnt a vipassana practice of mindfulness walking meditation, and I went to the bathroom and, as I passed the mirror I thought, ‘You’re fat.’ And I said, ‘Don’t think like that any more. Just accept. Just accept the moment completely as it is ... and go and do the walking meditation because you’re in such a bad way. You’re in such a bad way mentally and emotionally that, if you don’t take a positive step and move toward something that may be of benefit, you’re going to drown in this stuff. You know that you can do stuff to work through this. But it’s just painful.’ So I thought, ‘Right, I’m not going to have negative thoughts about myself. I’m just going to go out and do this walking meditation.’ And then I did. I went out. I did the breathing and felt really, really into my body. I got really solidly into my body. My mind-body connection was very earthed. And started very slow steps, really aware of my feet. And I suddenly was ... it was a very profound experience: I was in the body of a young boy being yelled at and I became aware I was my dad, for a minute. And it was, like, my grandmother – he was sent off to boarding Catholic school with all the priests, so who knows what got my dad there – and so he’s come back from boarding school wanting to see his darling mother who was really the matriarch and the leader of the entire Maclaren family. And she was yelling at him saying, ‘Look what you’ve done! You’ve ruined this energy here. You’ve created ... look at the other kids, they’re upset. It’s all your fault ... rrhhhh!’ And she’s yelling at
him in her Irish Catholic nasty sort of way. And he’s sort of ‘Ah!... [little, scared voice]’. And then the next minute the announcement that his father had died and he was 12 years old. He was ... it was almost like ... I had the mind of him until I realised that, ‘Hang on, this is ... I’m doing walking meditation ... why am I here?’ And when I realised that’s when I got the announcement that my dad had died and then I was my dad and I felt ‘cctt’ [sudden sound]!”

Interviewer: Your dad had died?

Mia: No, my dad didn’t die but my dad’s father died when he was 12. And he got this bad news and it was so dreadful ... it was so dreadful for him that he froze. So I experienced the feelings my father had ... when he came home and when his father died. And it suddenly occurred to me, when I went home to visit him, he had done to me what she had done to him. And I realised that he had only brought that energy up – he didn’t know why he was so angry with me but I realised why the energy came up was not because he was angry with me but because he needs to resolve ... this stuff that had happened with his mother: why did she treat him like that when he got home from boarding school?

Interviewer: Did you know of this experience before?

Mia: No.

Interviewer: But you felt that, I mean you felt a real ... 

Mia: I felt like I was in his body genetically.

Interviewer: Was it like a trance?

Mia: Yes, it was like an out-of-body experience but in his body. But the bizarre thing was that when my father was being like this, because everyone was drunk, and when he yelled at me like this, then he got everyone a glass of wine and said, ‘Just everyone have a glass of wine and it will be alright.’ I said, ‘Well, I don’t drink any more so you can’t shut me up like that any more.’ And I said, ‘Dad, look at me.’ And when he looked at me, I swear I was looking at a child. I was looking at him thinking ... and he was like [child facial expression] ... he looked like a little kid and was all, like, ‘Uh ...’ And I remembered at the time thinking ... that’s very strange. It really shook ... took me back. And it was really hard to be angry with him at that point. So any way when I was doing this walking meditation, I realised I was dealing with a child. I was dealing with a childhood experience that hasn’t been dealt with, and that, through my connection with him, he’s dumped this stuff because he got it dumped on him but he wants to resolve it. So he’s dumped it at me but I actually can now, through doing the meditation, not grasp to my own reaction to it. I can now respond to him like saying, ‘How are you feeling just now dad?’ Do you know what I mean? Like, through this practice, I’m now not so caught up in my own drama and my own pain because I see the bigger picture. The bigger picture is there is no small Mia. There is just a very large bloody picture and it’s come from every direction, you know. And so when I
see him reacting like that, I don’t need to ... in his case because I did this ... this is amazing use of vipassana for me. I didn’t realise that this level of clarity could happen – that you could move through all this sort of work. And the relationship between my father and I is just remarkable now!

Interviewer: Really?

Mia: Oh yes. It’s just so healed. Yeah.

Interviewer: When you said you could do all those things and not be the small self, you took that practice with the relationship with your father?

Mia: But I’ve never discussed it with him. I just practice with myself.

Interviewer: So can you just give some examples of how you practice that? When you talk with him.

Mia: This last time I went back home, my sister was getting ... We came back from India, went to Munn to my sister’s wedding. So that was just a month ago. And he was at the wedding. My sister hasn’t forgiven my father and didn’t ask him to make a speech at her wedding, but had asked my mother. So my father got drunk and was sitting – there were many, many big tables ... you know, the big wedding thing. And so my father was sitting there and my nanny – we had a nanny when I was a child – she was sitting next to him, ‘Oh, oh,’ like this. She’s very gentle and a bit spongy. Because he’s a big man, he’s a lawyer, he’s a powerful man. And we’ve all had to play this emotional game with him ... you know, as people do in their families. So I went and sat down and I had some cheesecake – and I love cheesecake, wow I haven’t had it for a year and here is the most beautiful one with layers. I sit down with this cheesecake, say my little prayer and it doesn’t inherently exist but it’s going to be yummy. And my dad sitting there going, ‘I’m f****** out of here! I’m out of here [vicious voice]!’ And I turned to him and I thought, ‘He’s upset not getting his speech.’ I said, ‘Ah, you’re alright dad.’ And I thought, ‘Wow! My heartbeat is not raised. My heartbeat hasn’t gone up.’ And he’s cursing and hissing – he’s big, he’s six foot three, and very wide. ‘I’m f****** out of here. Rrrhh ...!’ Julie is sitting there with tears rolling down her face. She’s absolutely mortified and shaken.

Interviewer: This is your sister?

Mia: No, my nanny. When we were kids, there were six of us and we had a nanny. She lived with us. She’s still a very close family member. I’m sort of looking at him and he’s drinking his wine and I could see this character. I was looking at him and I thought, ‘Well, I can understand why he feels like that but if I sit here next to you I’m not going to experience my cheesecake. I will eat it out of habit ... feeling bad and I’ll miss out on it.’ So I actually made a decision to move to another place to eat my cheesecake [laughs]. Because I knew that there was nothing I could say to him to calm him down. There was nothing. But I saw that he was in a bad way and I said, ‘Dad, you know ...’ I understood at the time
where he was with it because ... but he doesn’t remember how he abused her. And I know she hasn’t forgiven him and he won’t take any responsibility of anything. So I just thought, ‘This is just a hard place to be in, but I understand where you’re at because you don’t know how to deal with it. It’s too big for you to accept that you were violent and nasty, and that you’re being very rude right now. It’s too big for you to accept this and so it’s no use for me to say anything about it now. But I want to eat my cheesecake because it’s desert time.’ So I just moved to another table. And I loved my cheesecake and I experienced it, you see. So it’s not huge – they’re not huge things. But you know the next day I was the only person he wanted to talk to.

Interviewer: So he sensed that. He sensed that you weren’t angry at him.

Mia: Yes, didn’t judge him too.

Interviewer: That’s pretty big.

Mia: That was pretty big. When I got home I thought ...

Interviewer: It’s important for your well-being ...

Mia: Oh, yeah! He didn’t intimidate me or make me turn into a little girl. And more, really, I love having respect for him even though he was being like that.

Interviewer: That’s amazing because at many times you must have hated him.

Mia: Yep. It’s a big habit.

Interviewer: At least it looks like you’ve got over a lot of it. It’s pretty deep.

Mia: It is and I’m now working currently with my mum. And I’ve just had a similar experience but I won’t go into that, but it is similar. Because my mum was an alcoholic for twenty years, like where she gets falling down drunk. So yeah I’ve just been through this stuff with my mum, and I found deep down in my heart I was judging her and angry with her in a similar way. But even though it sounds easy, for two weeks I had to sit and just breathe and be, in the vipassana way ... mindful with this suffering that I was feeling. Inside this little girl is going, ‘Arrhhh ... [screeching, screaming]’ – it’s like that, like animals crawling and saying, ‘I don’t want to go there. This hurts too much. I don’t want to confront this pain.’

Interviewer: So where did you do the vipassana?

Mia: I’ve never done a vipassana. Just been studying.

Interviewer: You studied then did it on your own?

Mia: Well, I don’t ... shouldn’t call it maybe vipassana but I think vipassana is about the mindfulness process. And so I just do mindfulness when I sit and
breathe. And I am very ... because I like to come up out of my head, my consciousness ... I think people who have been bashed violently, they as children, as a way to cope, they pop up out here, their consciousness. Because if they've got to stay in their body it's going to hurt too much. It's a coping mechanism, of disassociation. So I've learnt that I disassociate a lot; so I've learnt to keep myself staying in my body. And when I keep myself in my body, then I have to feel this painful stuff – like all this stuff that's happened to me. And when I do that, instead of jumping out again which is so easy for me because it's like a three lane highway going up there [above the head], you know what I mean. But it's like being tortured down in here. So when I stay in my body, then I really focus on the breath, and I remember why I'm here and then I just allow it to present.

Interviewer: But that rather horrible experience does present itself?

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: And you just sit with it?

Mia: Yeah, and I try and breathe and hold on. I'm very kind to myself – I nurture myself. Try to be very supportive, loving and compassionate to myself that ... Because this is where I'm saying to you right at the beginning of the day, there needs to be somehow quite a healthy self for there to be no self. I don't claim I understand it. I really don't. I haven't ... I'm not enlightened. I haven't experience emptiness. I'm playing in this area, see.

Interviewer: But when you sit with that nasty feeling does it go away?

Mia: Eventually. Maybe over a while. But then it only goes away when I understand something about it like I thought it was the way my mum treated me, but actually what happened with my mum - it wasn't necessarily about the way she treated me, it was the way I had to turn when I was young. In the family system, you either become angry or judgmental at everyone and, 'Stop looking at me and stop looking at where I'm angry.' Like as a child you look at your parents you're going, 'You're so angry and you're hurting me,' and you're so innocent. And they go, 'Don't look at me like that because you're going to make me feel bad! Because you'll make me have to confront that I've been not a good person at the moment.' So as a child that rejection and that disconnection from your parents is very dangerous, and very fearsome. So instead of experiencing that and the rejection from them, I learnt how to become an angry and judgmental person ... and we were all in it together. So what I discovered in the last few weeks was that my compassion could be bigger than my judgment, and I could love her even if she was the way she was. It's like ... trying to kill herself with alcohol and smoking and the things she does that I see as so destructive of this amazing human life she's got. And then I really went, 'I can accept her the way she is, and her choices, and I just will love her.' And when I got the judgment out, that family system of judgment ... when that came out, then I could be present with the wisdom of seeing that it doesn't really exist the way I think it does any
way. And that she’s going to be the way she is anyway whether I’m there looking at it or not. But what happened was: I’m torturing myself by being judgmental ... because it feels so wrong to be angry and judgmental. And it creates so much negative karma for everyone – me, everyone ... that I finally got there and I suddenly went, ‘Hh ...’ and it was like a child saying, ‘But I kind of love her even if she’s doing that.’ And I’m thinking, ‘Yes,’ when you grow up you’re not going to bother whether she’s there supporting you or not. And I’m grown up now. And it was like saying, ‘We don’t have to be scared whether she’s going to reject us now or not.’

Interviewer: At least you’re not passing that much on to your son.

Mia: Oh, maybe from here not ... there’s always stuff you’ve passed on to kids. It’s just terrifying. But the amazing thing is that two days after I had that realisation, my mother rang me. She said, ‘Are you alright?’ We had a two-hour conversation about this stuff. It was just amazing. And I said to her, ‘This is the first time I felt really ever connected with you.’ And she said, ‘It feels lovely.’ And I’m forty. So I really think that meditation and this sort of work is ... Is it beneficial? It is major league beneficial, and not just for you, but for you, but for everyone. It affects everyone if you truly change.

Interviewer: And you have. So the practice of vipassana you do has emphasis on mindfulness and do you do loving-kindness meditation as well?

Mia: Well, sometime I do that. I don’t do that. I began doing those general meditation but I now have initiation and so I have commitments: practice sedanas [spiritual exercises] and ...

Interviewer: Can you briefly describe the types of practices that you do?

Mia: I do practices now that work very specifically on certain areas. Like I have one practice where I work completely around the speech. Like purifying my capacity to speak ... aspects of mind. So that when, say, if somebody is rude to me it’s about being completely in that moment that I understand that the only reason that somebody can be rude, as long as I haven’t created any causes right there and then, is when they are caught in a deluded state. And this practice is completely about that moment of seeing ... that others can be in a deluded state – not only just me, but others can. And often that’s when the negative or harsh speech might come out. And when I recognise that that might be the case then I dedicate myself toward gently and lovingly and respectfully helping them to resolve what it is that’s going on. So that’s one practice.

Interviewer: What’s that called?

Mia: That’s a manjushri. You know manjushri? Manjushri is about the intellect: speech, wisdom.

Interviewer: What are the other major ones? Vipassana you just described.
Mia: But I do that more in living day. But I sit down in the morning and sit down at night. And I do higher cega tantra practices.

Interviewer: What’s that?

Mia: It’s a practice of actually having to identify with the deity rather than just ... you can modify your behaviour on the outside ... that's one, that's like sutra. But tantra is where you actually affect what you are.

Interviewer: OK, this is a tantric practice.

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: And what does that help you do?

Mia: That’s everything. That’s everything I’ve talked about: the whole entire path of Buddhism is contained in the practice I do. And I can't talk about it a real lot. It’s called the secret teachings because you get initiation and you study, and only people who've had initiation study it, just to keep it pure. And to keep it quite focused.

Interviewer: It would be a meditation that encompasses ...

Mia: There’s a *sedana* that you can read through which, you know, is a meditation. The only reason you’d read it is because that’s the blueprint of the meditation. So you study and read through the *sedana* for a long time because there is so much in it. Like, if you do the long *sedana* it can take up to half an hour just to read through it. But if you're going to study all the points in it, then that can take hours. Because I’m a mum and working and studying I have a short version which doesn’t ... I do six times a day. I do three in the morning and three at night and sometime I do them throughout the day. I scatter them. There are lots and lots of benefits. One is that it take your mind to the enlightened mind ... well, as close to the enlightened mind as I can get at this point in time. Every time you do that, the whole prayer if you do it, you know ... like you contemplate but you’re not attached: that phenomena can't make you happy ... so you can renounce it; that compassion and wisdom goes hand in hand because to understand that people are caught in deluded state is the wisdom, and to actually arise compassion is the balance of that. Which the two grow together like this, you know. So it goes through all of that stuff.

**Part 2 (6 May 2005)**

Interviewer: It’s so nice to hear stories of great changes especially your parents and son and how much they will affect the world.

Mia: Ah, yeah, people I work with can't kill ... you know, like with all the kids at school, they don’t kill the bugs in the sand pit any more.
Interviewer: They don't? Why?

Mia: The kids. I'd be sitting there and some little boy would come up and squash an ant. And I go, ‘Ah! [high scream]’ and he'd go, ‘What?’ I go, ‘Screaming from the ant. Couldn’t you hear?’ And he’d go, ‘Why would an ant scream?’ I’d go, ‘Why, don’t you think he would be scared to be squashed down like that? It’s sitting there going “Ah!”’ And the kid would be going, 'Wo...oh!' [laughs] And he wouldn't want to do it any more.

Interviewer: So you taught this to the kid like by example.

Mia: Well, I'd just do it, you know. Well, I did panic when he did went and killed the ant.

Interviewer: This is Ian's friend?

Mia: No, sorry, I worked for four and a half years at a before-and-after school care. I mind children before and after school, up to 40 children at night and in the morning 12-15 children.

Interviewer: So you taught that to them?

Mia: Yes, just by living. Like you said ... but it does go out further and further. I suppose it does because I remembered that little kid’s reaction. He's not going to squash an ant without thinking any more [laughs].

Interviewer: This part is about happiness and purpose. Describe what happiness is to you.

Mia: What happiness is to me? [very long pause] There’s lots of ... there’s words. There's the relative meaning of happiness, you know, like watching my son on stage perform with his guitar. You know, that’s a kind of form of happiness. It’s there. But I think, really the happiness I felt was when ... it is a very hard thing to access actually, this feeling because I've had it so rarely. But it is when I feel totally and utterly connected with another human being and this feeling, like ... I would go anywhere and do anything for them to help them. And there is this kind of freedom of not having to be attached to my own body because I know they'll come and go. If I wasn't so attached to myself, my body then it limited this capacity to feel so deeply for others. And yet at the same time there wasn’t any structure or anything. I wasn’t, like, solid like me and you. It was so far beyond that. There was such an amazing sense. I wasn’t necessarily seeing that being as someone limited to their body and who they were. And it wasn’t with a lover. It was just in moments of ...

Interviewer: Are you talking about a specific experience?
Mia: Yes, I think that’s ... what was it? I don’t know. You just like ... moments. Like sometimes maybe somebody would be talking to me about something they’re upset about and going through. And you can have this long conversation; you’re really, really wrapped up in somebody’s world and what’s going on for them or something. There’ll come a moment when I’ll go, you know, everything that they’ve been sort of struggling with, just suddenly your eyes will meet, and you’ll see it in their eyes. They’ll go, ‘It doesn’t matter, does it.’ And I just get this dissolving feeling like my whole body and their body is dissolved for a second. Everything around, all the tightness around the heart will dissipate, and mine too. It sort of releases you to feel for a moment absolutely no ... like you’re out of prison. Like you’re out of any ... like you’re still sitting there seeing everything but you’re just not constricted by anything. And you’re not just the body. That moment you could be the sky, the floor and the table and that person and none of it, and all of it. You know, just for a moment. And you know that that person is there. And you know that they may never be able to describe it, the same as you can never really describe it. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: I get the feeling. But I haven’t experienced that.

Mia: Yeah. And I can ... maybe a few times felt that in my meditation where ... And so that’s happiness for me ... at that point. That’s what I feel happy about. I feel happy ... like if I was to describe a feeling that’s happy.

Interviewer: It sounds like you’ve had difficulties experiencing happy states of mind.

Mia: I’ve found it hard to attribute ... Yeah, maybe ... maybe that’s true. I’ve found it hard to attribute happiness to certain things that other people might think are happy ... like buying a car, or ... I felt really happy when I met my lama and I felt incredibly happy when I met my son. But I don’t have much ... got given a diamond ring and I sort of felt, ‘Oh yeah?’ Do you know what I mean? Like things that other people says what’s happiness they might describe as nice moments but to me they’re just kind of still messy moments.

Interviewer: Your happiness is more in relation with other people in terms of connection with other people.

Mia: Yeah. But I can also experience that on my own. I’ve had moments of meditation where I felt ... like I had once on a bus, I was heading back to see my lama and Ian was asleep and it was in India, and it was a local bus – My God, never go on a local bus in India [laughs], just like being in hell – but I was sitting there and I suddenly had this feeling that I was on the most direct path to my lama. And it was ... just like I was the whole bus; I was like everyone in the bus; I was like the sky; I was like the grasses; I was like the ground; I was like where we started from and where we ended up. It was just like, just for a little moment, I just felt absolutely blissfully happy.

Interviewer: That’s amazing.
Mia: Yes, that was nice.

Interviewer: To be in that hell bus and to be very happy.

Mia: Yeah. I didn’t last long ... because the next time, you’re trying to go to sleep and bang your head and the kids falling off ... [laughs]. But there are some more moments: sitting around having a dinner conversation and stuff like that with friends, I don’t necessarily call that being happy – I’m feeling pleasant maybe, or I’m feeling social or stuff like that. But happy, really happy ... that’s reserved for the most extreme moments of either interconnectedness with ... I don’t know ... just the things I describe.

Interviewer: What do you see as your ultimate purpose in life?

Mia: [Sign] To reach enlightenment so that I may benefit all sentient beings. I know it sounds like what everyone says but actually that ...

Interviewer: On what kind of level do you believe that?

Mia: As deep as I’ve ever gone. As deep as I’ve ever gone. There isn’t to me ... there are no other purposes in life. I can’t find a purpose, and that’s maybe why I could never get into becoming a career person. I couldn’t see any purpose in it. I couldn’t, but now ... I don’t mind studying in this area because if I’m going to help people who are really suffering then I can see a purpose to doing this particular work because I might be able to help them unravel a little bit for them to keep going. So I see a purpose in this because it agrees with my big purpose.

Interviewer: It sounds like a fairly strong conviction to me. Honestly, I haven’t heard as strong a conviction as you, very few times. Usually there is some doubt but for you it is more secure.

Mia: Yeah, it’s solid. I sometime get lost in it because ... and I’ll sit there and think, ‘Which? I can’t make a decision because I don’t know,’ because I’ll have an attachment that I’ve got stuck in. But the reason I’ll get out of it is because I’m still heading on this path.

Interviewer: And when did you come to that conclusion?

Mia: When I was very young. When I was very young ... I knew that I would come to the earth to unconditionally love everyone. I remembered telling people I knew why I’d come here.

Interviewer: But when did you come to the conclusion that you wanted to seek enlightenment.

Mia: It seems that it’s always been with me that ... I’ve always been looking. I knew that my mind was fault ever since ... I knew that other people’s minds were
fault and I knew my mind was fault as a child. I remember as a very small girl – I’d have to ask my mother to know when this happened – we ..., all three girls had the pink room and all three boys had the blue room. And I remembered that I was somewhere under 5 [years old] because after 5 or 6 we got our own rooms. So I’m somewhere under 5 but I remember lying on bed staring at the wall, and I could see the black of my pupil on the wall. And I didn’t say it and didn’t really think it but I knew I was inhabiting my body. I knew I wasn’t the body then. And I knew I was looking through the pupils in my eyes, and I knew that the awareness looking through them would always stay in this body, and has been in other bodies. So I knew that. I’ve never had to discuss that. Reincarnation is something completely, completely fine with me. Whereas in my culture it’s not.

Interviewer: So to you, are reincarnation and karma and these sorts of concepts natural to you?

Mia: Yes. It was like I was brought up in Thailand, or India or Tibet. It really is. It’s like we always knew that. My family has a struggle with it because they are all Catholics.

Interviewer: And did you find that your experience with your son in India reinforced that?

Mia: Yeah.

Interviewer: I didn’t expect otherwise. I guess these sorts of purposes, enlightenment, compassion for other people, have shaped your life, the way you do things and why you do things. Is that correct?

Mia: Yes, for sure, everything.

Interviewer: Everything?

Mia: Yes, everything. Like my computer, the Apple Mac, the Dalai Lama, he supports the Apple Mac.

Interviewer: Yes?

Mia: Yes. I'll show you a picture. [She proceeded to show me a picture of this]. How bizarre. And you know when I was looking at computers, I knew that Apple Mac people had some good fibre about them. There was some positive, good quality about them. They had a good resonance about them. And when I saw that [the picture] I thought, ‘Oh look at that. It’s funny isn’t it.’ [laughs all around]

Interviewer: The last bit is about ethics. What does Buddhist ethics mean to you and how does that apply in your life? By ethics I mean the precepts.

Mia: I don’t use ... like when I speak to anybody in the West about ethics I never use the word ethics because it’s almost a bad word in the West. It’s almost your
straight and real weird [people] – a religious fanatic if you’re into ethics. I call them inner truths, intuition, knowing because that’s what they are for me. I know that when I come to work … point in life that I’ve got a decision to either act in this way or that way, one will have a resonance of clarity and inner knowing that’s calm, and one will have an agitation.

Interviewer: In the two decisions?

Mia: Yes, maybe I’ve got 5 decisions but one of them will have a clarity and an inner calm. And to me that is what ethics is. I know there’s a universal something that’s right. And I know it. But I hide from it sometimes, you know. I say, ‘Oh, I don’t want to know that.’ So I just think we know. I just think we all know. We know what’s right and wrong.

Interviewer: But what is that based on?

Mia: I think we have a raw Buddha-nature. I just think we are all connected to the same remarkable … there’s some hippie term like the great spirit or the eternal knowing or the one or God or Buddha-nature. It doesn’t matter what you call it; it’s still something we can access and tap into. And I just believe that that’s what ethics are: it’s an alignment to that which is clear and knowing, that which is in harmony with the totality. So that’s what ethics are for me.

Interviewer: In Tibetan Buddhism, I understand that there are 8 precepts. Is that correct for the lay people?

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: For you, are they applicable in your life or how do you view them?

Mia: Look, I’ve got this here. I’ve been thinking I should read them. That’s the Eight Worldly Dharmas. I try not to get too religious about Buddhism, even though I am. I’m the most passionate, full-on person into Buddhism that I know, and I can’t help it. But it’s not about doing the thing that … it’s not about following a trend for me. If it doesn’t make sense then I cannot do it. Do you know what I mean? I can’t … I get ‘Arrhh!’ I feel like I can’t move to places where I don’t feel OK. So the Eight Worldly Dharmas is something that I haven’t really done/seen as a structure and apply. Do you know what I mean? I don’t really know what they are. Couldn’t tell you what they are, but I’m sure I’ve read them and I know that they’re true.

Interviewer: Well, for example, you’ve illustrated it very well even in killing taking the life of sentient beings, you’ve demonstrated that you abhor that. And you teach kids as well. I think it might be your Catholic upbringing that dislikes structure. But in my view the precepts are more of a guide which while they are on a more superficial level they do have strong theoretical background and do relate back to all the spiritual things.
Mia: I wouldn’t want to put them down. Never. I wouldn’t criticise them but I’d just never ... like I said I could probably look through them.

Interviewer: But let’s briefly go through them. Like killing, so you don’t kill any animals. Has that been a philosophy for you before Buddhism?

Mia: It has but I’ve violated it in my life. I’ve had two abortions, both which sent me quite insane. Both were really weird. So I have actually ... and considering that I might have had a very high lama as a child, you don’t even want to think about who I killed – it’s a scary thought.

Interviewer: Is that before you went to India?

Mia: Yeah, well before when I was very young. Also I was under the influence of someone who I thought was my guru then. And he said, ‘Well if you have a baby you can’t really have a spiritual life.’ And so I was under the influence of a pretty creepy person. But it’s still my seed of killing. I’ve done a lot of purification and a lot of grieving over it, you know, because I love my son so much I think I could’ve had three kids. But anyway. It’s what I’ve done. So it’s wasn’t perfectly intact that wisdom.

Interviewer: Has Buddhism strengthened ...

Mia: Absolutely! I’m terrified of killing anything now [laughs]. I don’t want to go to the hell realm forever and forever. I’m probably already am, but I don’t want to lengthen the time by any mean. But not only that but I was allowed to come out of this hiding place ... that I used life. I was a damaged person; I was a very beaten, damaged person. I’ve been raped and beaten as a child, you know. I was damaged ... I was mental, like not balanced in a lot of ways. And coming out of that these things like, of course, you should ... like I was already a vegetarian – I was a vegetarian when I was 13. Yet I still had two abortions. I thought I was doing that for spiritual reasons, which was a manipulation from this character, but it was wrong – I just didn’t have that clarity. So in discovering Buddhism ... I mean not only do they say these things will have a result and that could be bloody bad result ... but not only that, I started developing this compassion for all other sentient beings and having a connection, because I became quite isolated really ... and angry and hurtful ... putting everything away. And when you stop that and you understand what’s going on for other people a bit more and you feel compassion for them, you don’t have to, you don’t hide so much any more.

Interviewer: What about things like false speech?

Mia: Yeah, I still work on all of this stuff. Do you know what I mean? Sometime I find myself exaggerating. I’m not a real big liar any more.

Interviewer: Any more?
Mia: But I have been. I have been throughout time. But now I don’t like it. But sometime I’ll exaggerate.

Interviewer: Why? Why don’t you like it?

Mia: Why? Because it’s a lie. It’s a lie.

Interviewer: Why is there a change of attitude?

Mia: Like if I sit here and lie to you, there’s a part of you that will go, ‘That’s weird. That was funny.’ Do you know what I mean? And I’d be going, ‘Oh he knows.’ And suddenly this would happen: whssstt [sudden, sharp noise]! Because you’ll be rightful in thinking, ‘Something’s not right here. I don’t trust this person.’ And for me one of the worse things is my mother and father had withdrawn from me. There were so many conditions on them liking me and accepting me that I’d do anything to be in their communication. I did discover that when you exaggerate a lot or lie, that actually even if you think you’re making some progression you’re actually isolating and I don’t like it. I don’t like that. And I don’t like going into a room thinking, ‘Who did I tell what to?’ Because it is very confusing ... and even if it’s intense I’ll just sit there with people ... ‘Yeah, I said that,’ you know, and face it. Because I know that there’s this really unpleasant moment that will happen and then they’ll go, ‘Ah well, at least you told me the truth.’ Or at least I’ll go, ‘At least told the truth.’ I don’t have to live with the aftermath – I don’t like that. I don’t like the feeling of lying. And I know when somebody is lying to me and I’ll sit there and go, ‘Right, OK.’ But no I don’t feel upset about it; I think, ‘I wonder why they need to do that?’ It’s not a problem any more. But sometime I exaggerate. I don’t think I’ve exaggerated today actually ... but I sometime do. I don’t need to. When I talk about this I don’t need to exaggerate. My life has been so bizarre.

Interviewer: And do you drink?

Mia: No.

Interviewer: Do drugs?

Mia: No.

Interviewer: And ...

Mia: I drink coffee.

Interviewer: Well there are people who consider coffee intoxicants but it is debatable. I wouldn’t go that far.

Mia: It is slightly. I asked my lama and he looked at me and went, ‘Just drink your coffee.’

Interviewer: Yes, I think so.
Mia: You see but when I do therapy I do not drink coffee. And when I’m doing any ritual or initiation because what I experience is that it cuts me off a bit. I can’t be as sensitive or aware when I’m drinking coffee. If I’m with a client I just have to become so sensitive to their world. Anything that would make me slightly agitated then I don’t do that.

Interviewer: What about sexual misconduct? What do you feel?

Mia: For myself I don’t ... I have practiced sexual misconduct the whole of my entire life! My father had many lovers. They had the sickest, weirdest sexual thing going on in my family. And my whole culture, like what it seemed although I’m sure people weren’t doing this but everybody was sleeping with strangers. It was what people did. But I used to heavily drug myself before I did it; I was always drunk or stoned or something as a younger person. And that’s when I do that sort of thing. And it sort of happened on and off throughout my life, but I think the more I’ve understood ... but then I got into a long relationship with Mark for 10 years, and even though that would peak its head in, Mark ...

Interviewer: Is that that Ian’s dad?

Mia: No, Ian’s dad was a Buddhist. We were together about 3 to 4 years. But he broke my nose and kicked me and did a bit too many times. Then when he was throwing rocks at me when I was carrying the baby I just thought, ‘No, he’s just dangerous, bit too loopy.’ So I had to move away from him. And then I got with a man that was not violent. I think I went and hid for a while.

Interviewer: Are you still struggling with the idea of sexual misconduct?

Mia: I kind of know what sexual misconduct is on some fairly superficial level: that’s when you’re harming anyone. But where I’m sitting with it at the moment is that if it’s not ... because you want to bring a child into the world and if it’s not because you’re in some kind of spiritual union with someone, then there’s not much [point] ... I think I violate myself by just entering into ... like I can’t just enter into casual relationships any more.

Interviewer: So you don’t do that any more?

Mia: No. I can’t. I’m too sensitive now [laughs]. I take people’s energy on when they walk past in the streets. Like if someone’s really angry around me it take some time for me to realise that it’s not me that’s angry. You know, I’m too sensitive now.

Interviewer: The reason I asked that is that some people who I’ve talked with, being Australian, they say it’s very tricky issue because Australians are fairly liberal with the idea of sex. And that in Buddhism it requires a lot self-control and mindfulness. That’s why I mentioned that.
Mia: I don’t think Buddhism as control. I don’t see it as control at all. In fact, Buddha would turn over if he’d you say that. I think that when people come to a real awareness of a situation there is no control that’s needed. It’s just that awareness and you either want to honour that or you don’t. So for me it’s not about control. So I think throughout your past, at this time in my life, maybe it wasn’t sexual misconduct to sleep with other single people casually. Maybe nobody was being hurt in that moment. Maybe where I was at it was OK but when I moved through with my meditation and had realisations about subtler energy and interconnectedness and Ian and broadened my awareness and my awareness of my own self, then it was no longer relevant to incorporate that. And it wasn’t a control thing too. Do you know what I mean? It’s not control. I don’t think it is control when you realise the truth of something. That’s what I was saying before ...

Interviewer: It looks like you’ve moved beyond.

Mia: Yeah. It’s like that happened with cigarettes, dope, speed, alcohol, everything, for me. I’ve been through lots of stuff. But really, some people who have only met me in the last few years I’ll say, ‘I used to be a pisshead and into sleeping around.’ They’ll go, ‘You? No! Never! You? Can’t believe it.’ Like they just can’t believe it.

Interviewer: Wow.

Mia: But when I was there I was fully there ... experiencing it. But I had so many problems I was hiding. I had so many ... I was so not experiencing the present moment because it was too dangerous and I told you about that why ... why it’s dangerous. Because you challenge everyone and they reject you. If you’re in the moment and challenge them then they’ll reject you and you have to live an isolated weird life. So it wasn’t worth it. So the more I can undo these prisons I’ve created and be a lot more free to be in the moment ... I don’t think people even make passes at me any more. Do you know what I mean? It’s not like that. Or maybe they might think that they are but, you know, when they get to know me a bit better they’ll start telling me about their life or their mum or something. And I’ll think, ‘See it wasn’t about what you thought it was about.’

Interviewer: It’s the way you carry yourself now. It would be significantly different by judging the way you’ve told me about other people’s reaction. Might have been different previously.

Mia: Absolutely. Absolutely. It is not the same. Mind you, I don’t look the same. I was younger and had long hair and very skinny ... not very skinny but slimmer. You know, like those things change too. But I know women my age that are still doing this sort of game. And I don’t mind if they do that. That’s OK if that’s where they’re at. I remember.
Interviewer: And you mentioned briefly that when you looked in the mirror at one time you said I look fat or something like that. Is that an issue with you because of your past that you don’t like yourself at moments?

Mia: I don’t know. I don’t know. It’s definitely an arena I have to work in. I’ve tried to understand that. Like before when you said, ‘I get too sleepy,’ to me it was like ‘Wow! I’m going to write that down. I’m going to think about that.’ Because to me that was a little piece of information that I hadn’t heard before, because that fits in. When I was down with my family ... can’t remember what it was ... they had said something and confront that sort of thing. And mum sat there and said, ‘Oh Jesus, Mia, do you have to be so intense first thing in the morning. Right? I’m 39 years old and that’s how it is. I think ... so I just eat more. Do you know? It’s mean a self-regulating shut-up: don’t make everyone upset.

Interviewer: I see. So you develop that habit of eating more so you shut up.

Mia: Maybe, I don’t know. But you’ve just given me a little gem to look at. I’ve looked at many, many things to do my issue about weight ... because I don’t really care what I look like.

Interviewer: But you’re not fat in the first place.

Mia: No, no. It’s really deep. And I think it will be a really great thing for me to explore because if do get to explore this and understand it there’s probably a lot of people I could help. Because it’s a big problem in society. This way we ... But I mean it’s self-grasping, isn’t it? I hold myself to exist in this way. It’s self-grasping, but why I don’t know.

Interviewer: Did you go to church a lot?

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you feel that deep down the teaching that you got, the culture that you had, made you feel not good enough?

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: You think that’s the case?

Mia: Yes, for sure. Yes. It’s just how to undo it you know. Because I think that as much as ... say, in your past life you’re a thief. In this life you’re born in a brand new culture and in a brand new situation, you’re a pristine new baby, you’ve got all these seeds of karma stored up somewhere. But until you’re sitting in someone’s house and there’s money sitting there you haven’t ripened the environment, the conducive environment ... suddenly there’s this thing, ‘I could take that. Tuunk!’ The seed of karmic stealing has arisen. It was the environment that was conducive to that arising. And I think that ... I trust the process a bit more of environments producing those conditions and if I honour them
something’s going to bubble up. I’m going to either see I’m fat, ‘Ohhh! That’s interesting. Why would you hold to that? Why have that paradigm? Why hold to it?’ So when it’s in my face ... I’ve usually created the causes through meditation and unravelling. It’s like you’re unravelling the whole blanket but you just can't unravel up here because you’re make a knot. But to have it all like this you’ve got to have it like this but build a bridge bit by bit. So if it is that hold to myself to be fat because I don’t feel good about myself because of culture imputing or something, I’m open to exploring that. I love the thing you said about you not liking to eat too much because you feel sleepy. This is really interesting to me.

Interviewer: What about things like consumption. I assume you’ve been a conscious consumer in terms of what you buy already. So would Buddhism have made an impact or not?

Mia: Yes, it’s made me not be so controlled about it. That when you’re out ... I don’t eat meat when I’m out, I never eat meat. And I’m always sad when people have cooked and only have cooked meat because I won't eat it. It’s something I don't do. But when I’m out I’ll eat cakes that aren’t organic and you know. Because when I met Buddhism I didn’t eat sugar. I didn’t eat eggs. I didn’t eat meat. I didn’t eat ...

Interviewer: You’re a vegan.

Mia: Oh yeah. I was a vegan. And when I had Ian I was a vegan. I was strict, really strict and controlled. I thought that if I had a pure diet that I could have a pure mind. Which is just not true. It doesn’t work. I wish it would because it’s an easier path than being a Buddhist. So I retained ... sometime I’ve fall a bit into ... sometime I think ... we’ll get a pasta or something and I’ll think, ‘Ah, oh ...’ Like I knew not to get that and I’ll just do it any way, you know. In some sort of place it doesn’t look like good food or something. But in becoming a Buddhist it made it easier to be easy going where I was and accept the offering of where I was rather than saying, ‘That’s not the way I like it. It’s got butter in it.’ Not so fascist any more.

Interviewer: That’s good to hear.

Mia: Absolutely. It’s liberating. It’s so more social. Because when I didn't drink, didn’t smoke, didn’t drink coffee, didn’t drink milk, didn’t eat cheese, you know, you can't go out to a café. And nobody wants to go anywhere with you because you're so you know ... I can't do anything. It’s awful [laughs].

Interviewer: Do you have different friends?

Mia: I have a couple of incredibly deep, deep friends ... like really close friends

Interviewer: Are they Buddhists?
Mia: She’s becoming a Buddhist definitely. Her husband has just left her and she is ringing me every night. And she tells me, ‘I woke up in the middle of last night and I did what you said. I held the places where I was feeling the anxiety, and I breathe, and I was really aware of my breath.’ And she said, ‘Then suddenly this cry came up like an ocean,’ and she cried, ‘And I just breathed and watched the cry come out and I let the cry happen and I was gentle on myself.’ And she said, ‘You know after that it was all gone!’ And I was like, ‘Great!’ So we’re using Buddhist methods but the nice things about her, rather than client who may not choose to become Buddhist when they’re using these sorts of methods, is that she’s reading books by lamas and how to meditate Buddhist style. So she is someone I felt really confident about giving these sorts of books to. This is after 10 years of knowing her! So slowly, slowly ... she’s been my best friend ... but slow, slowly I’ve given her these things now. Something’s ripened in her mind that suddenly she went, ‘Have you got any of those books by those lovely lamas that you like to go and see?’ And I thought, ‘Yeah, actually I do.’ And so slowly, slowly she’s ... and she loves it and can’t get enough, she’s right now, she’s away, she’s into it. I don’t think she calls herself a Buddhist yet but she’s definitely, definitely utilising practices to help her stay aware and processing her grief ... and non-attachment. So she’s using that. And Ian he’s my best friend really. He’s like my flatmate. I know he’s my son but he’s also like my flatmate. He’s like a friend.

Interviewer: I am waiting to see him. He must be fascinating.

Mia: Well, he’s also a very normal boy. This is the most wonderful thing about him is that he’s a really normal boy. He’s more likely to want you to go listen to his guitar than sit down and have an intellectual conversation ... which is very easy going. I think the Buddha must have been a very easy going person. I think he would have been really easy and beautiful to be around. Because he had no attachments.

Interviewer: That’s true. I hadn’t thought of what he would be like. If you look at the Dalai Lama as possibly the closest ... 

Mia: And he’s just so darling and easy going.

Interviewer: Well all my questions are asked but we can talk informally or whatever. It’s very enjoyable.

Mia: I think this last subject is ... this doesn’t end until it ends.

Interviewer: Which last subject?

Mia: When we were talking about ethics. I think that’s how we went into the subject of ... because ethics are the closest thing to ground level where you see what’s going on, I think, when you become mindful. Because when we go into a state of agitation that’s when you know that something’s out of whack. Because when you’re in flow and not doing unethical things everything sort of flows. You
know, you get into quite a long period of time ... and then something will happen, some interaction will happen and suddenly everything go ‘Oohhh!’ Or you had an argument with your wife or you’re angry at something and there’s agitation, and you think, ‘What happened?’

Interviewer: OK.

Mia: ... Like, I like having vows. Because I have taken vows to not do certain things. And so sometime I’m so caught up ... like, when I was having this thing with my mum I became aware at one stage where I was thinking, ‘Oh, just go and get drunk now!’ and I haven’t been drunks for years, but it was so intense for me to be going through this thing that ... I had forgotten in that moment to go back and be mindful, because I was so ... swept in this tsunami of feelings. And I thought ... then I thought I got a vow not to drink. So that point in time, the vow, I decided to use control ... and a vow ... because I have a vow not to take intoxicants. I’ve taken them except for one. They’re slightly different: they’re Bodhisattva vows. Some of them I haven’t taken like ... I’m talking about the lay ones, I haven’t taken the nun ones.

Interviewer: So you took the vows in Nepal where you met the lama?

Mia: I’ve taken them a few times now. I took them with him and then I’ve taken them with my lama, the Dalai Lama and refreshed them a few times.

Interviewer: So you’ve taken those vows and you say that once when you wanted to get drunk and then ... I guess because the buzz wasn’t strong enough. [laughs]

Mia: No because I was so caught up in the attachments and emotions, you see. Because wherever the buzz was it wasn’t as bad as the pain I was feeling of this anger and everything arising, you see.

Interviewer: But then you remembered that you’ve taken the vow ...

Mia: Yes, so that helped me stepped back. And when I stepped back I thought, ‘Ah that’s right. I’m supposed to be mindful here.’

Interviewer: And you did it.

Mia: Yeah, I did get through.

Interviewer: And you didn’t get drunk?

Mia: No.

Interviewer: That’s pretty good.
Mia: Yeah, I was very pleased not to get drunk. I don’t want to go there. Like I’ve watch so much suffering going on with people who get drunk. And I don’t want to go there.

Interviewer: That’s good. So I didn’t mean control by that. But that’s a good example.

Mia: That is a good example of control. That’s different, I think, to a perceptual realisation where you realise the truth.

Interviewer: Absolutely.

Mia: And know that it’s … For me to eat an animal, I could just as well eat this table. It’s not part of my vocabulary. It’s not something … I’ve already seen that truth and I saw it very young when I was 13.

Interviewer: Why? About eating animals.

Mia: Yes. Just to me I felt it was the … I just … I was watching a duck one day walk and I was just thinking, ‘How can people look at them and think it’s food!’ It’s a being. It’s interacting with its children. It’s a mother. It’s a wife! Like I just had this whole realisation about this duck and I thought, ‘How can we eat it?’ Which was very difficult, you know. My family was like breakfast, lunch and dinner we had meat. It was just another way to piss my mother off, well, in her mind, but in mind I was just thinking about the duck. The duck! Did you see the duck! It had all these children and you just thought it was a roast duck! I was thinking of its babies and it put its wing and used its beak to bring its ducklings into itself. And I was so into it. And the cows, when the calves are taken from them, they scream! Have you heard them?

Interviewer: No?

Mia: It’s awful! It’s awful. It’s absolutely devastating. And I feel them. I feel the cows. I was once in this farm with this guy I went out with very briefly and this cow, its calf had been taken and it was on its own and it was in this much mud and it was sort of semi stuck in this mud. And this cow was trying to get through these thick metal bars near the milking shed. And it’s looking at me and it’s screaming, mooing. Then it’s looking at the baby and looking at me. And look I’d have to be as thick as 10 brick walls to not see that she was saying, ‘Can you see my baby! I need my baby! Get me my baby!’ Right? So I ran to the farmer who was the uncle of my boyfriend. And I said to him, ‘The cow, the calf is stuck in the mud’. [The reply was] ‘Oh yeah, he’ll be alright.’ And I said, ‘No, let’s get the calf out and give it back to the cow.’ [The reply was] ‘No, no we won’t be doing that love.’ I was stuck there and I just started crying and screaming at them, ‘The f***** cow, the calf, its baby, the cow … [hysterical voice].’ Like, I can see these guys and they’re going, ‘You, you could go to the loony bin Mrs.’ And I was going, ‘F*** this. I can’t understand this world. I want to go home.’
Interviewer: Did you succeed?

Mia: No, I was ineffectual. I couldn't find a way to move these people to give the calf back to the cow.

Interviewer: Where were they going?

Mia: Oh, they just take them away, feed them with little other things.

Interviewer: Oh they were taking him away ...

Mia: I don’t know what they were going to do with this calf. They might have been going to eat it or I don’t know what they were going to do. But all they saw was that I was mental, that the cow could not be talking to me, that the cow could not communicate that it wants its baby back, and that I’m just mental. Do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: Do you think ... I don’t know this but do you think that there are that many people who think that animals are just like sort of pebbles, then that would be a very sad thing to me. I don’t know enough.

Mia: That’s huge here in Australia. We have battery chicken. Anyone who eats a battery chicken.

Interviewer: But do you actually think that people believe that animals such as cows, ducks or chicken that they don’t have any emotions, that they don’t love their children.

Mia: I think they think like that. Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think so?

Mia: Yes, heaps. People don’t want to feel. People are so ...

Interviewer: I think you have to be as thick as the thickest thing in the world because ...

Mia: But this is where I was saying that I believe that the politicians have got the people in the perfect position. They go off to work. They’re exhausted. They do a job they don’t like or respect. They get married. They make money. They go and buy an Xbox or Playstation 2 or whatever the new gadget is, and they go home on the weekend and play with it. Or they save up for one of these luxury, multi-storey apartment holidays for a week ... with their only week holiday. They’re not going do what I do. When I get some time off I go to the Dalai Lama in India to do teachings. They think I’m nuts! They don’t want to feel! Feeling hurts! Feeling means you’ve got to get back in your body and be connected and say, ‘Bloody hell doesn’t this hurt. I’ve got to face a lot. I’ve got to change a lot. But I don’t want to. I’m addicted to my beer. I’m addicted to my TV ... I’d choose this rather
than the responsibility of changing because the responsibility of changing is going to be full on.’ You know.

Interviewer: I think you may be right.

Mia: Yep. But it’s when their babies die. It’s like ... you know Jamie Oliver, I don’t know if you watch television, he’s a beautiful, beautiful human being. He just did a show; he’s changed the way children eat at lunch. There’s all this fried food all around, all disgusting food you wouldn’t give your dog. And he’s changed it all to vegetables and all this sort of stuff. You know, he’s saying this is expected with all the reports from the dieticians that this is the first generation expected to die before their parents because of stomach disease and cancer. It’s already showing. It’s just a weird control thing. It’s money. It’s an insensitivity, you see. It’s almost we’re in this insensitive space – I’ve been in there. I’ve been in there. I was angry bitter and judgmental to save myself the suffering of not being like that in a world that was like that. And coming out has been really full-on. My mother said to me when I was coming out, when she first rang that phone call, she said, ‘Darling, I think you imbalanced. I don’t think you’re very well. And I think all this meditation stuff, you’re pushing it too far. I don’t think you should think like that.’ Now this was her warning: either stop confronting me like this, in the way you’re being toward me, or I won’t talk to you. It was as clear as a bell, you know. So instead of reacting my normal way of saying, ‘Alright, maybe I’m like that. Maybe I am imbalanced. Maybe I am sick. Maybe I am mentally not well. Look at my life, it’s always been challenging.’ Instead of thinking like that, this time, I just went, ‘I completely accept that you think like that. I completely understand that that is part of your safety system. And I love you. I love whether you’re in there or not. I didn’t say it but in my heart, when I was talking to her – this was just last week. I just went, ‘I absolutely ... my boundary of love has just stretched more ... for you to be in there and say that to me. Cool. I understand why you’re doing it now. I didn’t understand before.’ So it’s like I’ve been in there, but to come out, like to cross over that thing was like ... I can just tell you it was just like I had and ECG done, I had blood tests, I had my heart monitored because I thought I was having a heart attack. That’s how hard it was to cross over, coming out of that belief system, to find out that I was judgmental. These things I discovered that I was telling you about my mother – honestly I woke up in the morning at with such heavy pressure and pain that was travelling down my arm, I thought I was having a stroke.

Interviewer: When you said coming out, I didn’t ... I am not clear whether coming out is a process that has been going on for the last, what, how long?

Mia: I wanted to understand I love my mum for a long time but it’s only ... I don’t know. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Sorry, coming out means specifically to your mum?

Mia: It’s was coming out ... when I say coming out I mean I was in a delusion. I knew I had anger. I knew I had bitterness. I knew my mother triggered it off. I
didn’t know why. But as I meditated I started to see that unless I was doing that projection of anger and the judgmentalism of all of society with my mother in the way that my family does it – this is in our family system – then I could not be accepted by her ... because if I was here and now and this clarity then I would look at her and see this is very nasty behaviour and stuff like this then she was going to get angry at me because she didn’t want to feel what she was doing wrong. Do you understand?

Interviewer: Yes.

Part 3 (6 May 2005)

Mia: When I say I’m coming out it’s like coming out of that deluded state of mind. And the reason why it was so hard was because I didn’t know what was keeping me in there. And what it was this co-dependent drama that I had to be judgmental and angry to fit in even though they ... Do you know what I mean? Because if I wasn’t in that then they would have to deal with their stuff as well. So as a child I just wanted them to accept me and love me; so I behave the way I did. So it was like coming out of all of that. I didn’t get that until the end; that was my gift.

Interview: And you got this last few weeks?

Mia: Yes.

Interviewer: That’s great.

Mia: I know it’s complicated but I think I pretty well got that bit.

At this point her son arrives back from school and the interview concludes.

Correspondence

E-mail (24 May 2005)
Dear Chaiyatron,

Thanks for your letter. Its interesting, can you tell me of the things that you experienced growing up without your father? Ian has contact with his step father, he just spent the weekend with him while I was in Granville studying. So he does get some contact, not a lot. I have had very little therapy, but had some on Sunday which was very liberating, I’m open to therapy, I have I think quite a deep well of grief, but as it comes up now, I can do something about it, I have somewhere to reach out to.

You are very open and honest, I like that about you. I have also had concerns about how I was bringing up Ian, and for all the problems and lacks I may have
he seems to be doing above average at school, on all levels, so he is a very resilient and resourceful person. He seems mostly happy, and if its my mood and he picks it up I try to help him realize that this is my stuff he is feeling and not to take it on.

I think I could benefit from hearing of your experience though if you want to share it.

Thanks

Love, Mia

E-Mail (8 October 2006)
This was an e-mail sent out to many people.

I just thought this was so amazing, loving you all from a far Naomi.

Those who attain perfect wisdom are forever inspired by the conviction that the infinitely varied forms of this world, in all their relativity, far from being a hindrance and a dangerous distraction to the spiritual path, are really a healing medicine. Why? Because by the very fact that they are interdependent on each other and therefore have no separate self, they express the mystery and the energy of all-embracing love. Not just the illumined wise ones but every single being in the interconnected world is a dweller in the boundless infinity of love.

- Prajnaparmita

Field notes

• Contacted her by phone on 2 May 2005. Son answered and transferred to her. Sound very pleasant with bright, clear voice. Seemed very receptive. Mia informed me she was studying Buddhist psychotherapy
• “Sometimes I call love and compassion a universal religion. This is my religion.” H.H. The 14th Dalai Lama ---- from the bottom of Mia’s every e-mail, (Others have different ones as well)
• She lived in a small town on the Belinda Coast but well in land. She lived in a cul-de-sac with quiet reasonably nice houses. But hers was a small one-storey brick unit that was basic but well-kept and tidy. It was modest but liveable and also did not display a very hippie nature, although there was a lot of Tibetan, Asian, Buddhist paraphernalia.
• She was very pleasant and warm in greeting and showed me things. I felt at ease and at home quickly. We ate lunch my mother had cooked up with salads.
• During the interviews she showed me many pictures of her son and their trip to India and Nepal. Her son, Ian, was very cute in these indeed. I can see why, dressed as a monk, the Indians would fall over for him.
• I met Ian when he came home from school at around 3.30pm. He was still cute but now more chubby. He was a typical Australian boy with blond hair. He talked to me with a little shyness but was good. He told me he played a mix of different tunes on the guitar. Did not like sport that much. He did not remember much of India the first time though which was a pity. He seemed to have a good memory though of how many times they went to India: 3 times although his mother argued that they went 4 times because once they went into the Nepal and re-entered. This was a rather mute point but Mia seemed quite keen on the point – this was strange to me.
Interview

29th September 2004 – translated from Thai

Interviewer: When did you start practicing and getting into dharma?

Uthai: I didn’t intend to take up practice. Because there was no intention ... When I was around ... when I first graduated with a degree in economics I was like everybody else ... like other young people and did things like they did. My father wanted me to go into the military and so I did that for about 5 years. I have a rank of first lieutenant. I was in finance in the army because I graduated in economics and I worked in the finance section of the army. I was in the army from around age 23-24. During that period, it was time to get married. But marriage back in those days for it was customary for the man to become ordain as a monk before doing so. It was Thai culture and heritage for a man to first become ordained before marrying in order to ... it was believed that if he was ordained before getting married the parents of the groom would received lots of merits. If the man got married and then got ordained then the wife and her family would get merits instead. Therefore it was customary for Thai men to become ordained before marrying. So they held a ceremony for me and I became a monk. As I a monk I was like other monks and lived in a monastery. OK, I had studied economics and I thought to myself, ‘I might as well utilise what I had learnt to help.’ The economics I had learnt ... studied it for 5-6 years and got a Masters degree ... was all about how do we use the limited resources we have in the best possible way. That was all it was ... all it was. Yes, six years and that was all it was [laughs]. So I went into the monastery and I examined whether all the resources there had been fully utilised in the best way. You know back then I was young and hot-headed, and I wanted to do something for my country. So I looked for ... what do you say ... um ... NPL’s ... you know non-performing-loans ... and I wanted the resources to perform and perform and perform. So I was looking whether things in the monastery were performing or not. But the only resources I could find in the monastery were monks. So I looked at whether the monks were performing or not, whether they were contributing to progress of the country. So I did that [laughs]. Yes, it was really like that in those days because I had just graduated and wanted to use what I had learnt to do good for the country. I was strong willed and opinionated – anything the adults did that I regarded as not right I wanted to change and rectify. So I examined whether the monks were performing or not. I was only able to take 1-month leave of absence from the army. After 1 month examining the monks I came to the conclusion that ... I concluded this 3 days before I was going to leave monkhood ... that monks only did 4 things: 1) go out on alms round, 2) eat, 3) engaged in prayers and 4) jum wat which means sleep. Only these 4 things ... I came to the conclusion that for young male Thais age around 18 up to 35 ... 300,000 to 400,000 of them ... for them only to engage in these 4 things, do you think they are performing? I don’t
think they are performing at all. I don’t think so. So with this conclusion and with only 3 days remaining I went to ask teacher monk who was looking after me – he was sixty and was a former government railway official who had lived in a forest monastery – and I asked him: “Can you give a frank answer to my thoughts? What do you think?” And he replied, “Uthai, I agree that monks do these 4 things but there is a fifth thing also.” I said, “As I have observed, there are only 4 things and for our best resources ... for male, Thai and at this age to do these activities is totally useless.” He answered, “You must engage in the fifth thing.” And what is this fifth thing: monks must *bhavana* [mental development]. So when he talked about *bhavana* I said, “OK, I am leaving monkhood in 3 days but I have not done the fifth thing.” He told me what to do and taught me to sit and meditate reciting the ‘buddho’ mantra with my eyes closed. We did this for 15 minutes and when I opened by eyes at the end I told him that nothing had happened. But he said, “This fifth thing you must do it continuously and then you will know.” So I had 3 days remaining, but you know 3 days as a monk is very boring ... very boring because as I said they only do 4 things. So I decided that since there were only 3 days left I will start to *bhavana* as of tomorrow ... yes, start tomorrow ... and I will do it the whole day. I don’t know how this happened, why I thought that way and it happened spontaneously at that moment ... because I wanted to experiment. If they say it’s good ... if it is good then I will try it tomorrow because I had nothing to do anyway.

Interviewer: You did it the whole day?

Uthai: Yes, I *bhavana* the whole day. But my *bhavana* was not sitting. Rather, I went on alms round as usual but in my mind I recited ‘buddho, buddho’ all the time. I don’t know how I thought of this ... how I did *bhavana* without sitting but I did it. That day I did not care whether anyone gave alms to me or not, I remembered. ‘buddho, buddho, buddho ... whether you give alms or not I didn’t care.’ When I got back to the monastery I had a shower ... ‘buddho, buddho’ ... and it was the same while changing robe or whatever else I was doing. I was reciting ‘buddho, buddho’ all the time. And when there was a meal ... usually there would be many monks eating together and they would chat like any of us ... but that day I ‘buddho, buddho’ without telling anybody that today was going to be like that. They were a bit puzzled. Whatever I did whether it was walking around or whatever I was with ‘buddho, buddho’ all the time. I wanted to try and see what would happen. Because I had been saying ‘buddho, buddho’ all day ... before I went to bed I went to sit and meditate with the same ‘buddho’ but now there was a different feeling as oppose to in the morning when I started ‘buddho.’ There was the feeling of light body, running tears, body hair standing up, and a weird kind of happiness ... a weird kind of happiness that was ‘wong wong’ [hollow sound indicating emptiness, eeriness, strangeness]. It was like quiet and lonely-ish and ‘wong wong.’ I’ve never felt this way before. What is going on here? Is anything going to happen? Then I thought back. When I was at Chulalongkorn university ... I went to Chula and did a Bachelors there ... when I got admitted into Chula my father ... before I went to Chula, I was often kinda locked up in my house. I was not able to go out like other teenagers because in the morning a car would drop me off at school and then it would pick me up
afterwards. Wherever I went a car would accompany me and a driver would watch over me. I could not go out and mess around. But when I got into Chula my father was very happy and gave me a car, and he gave me a salary. Before that I received money everyday but getting into Chula I got a brand new car and a lump sum salary every month. So for me I had been cooped up for a long time and now it was release. And I said to my friends, “Let’s go out.” I had about 15 wild friends and they took me places. I’d been caged for so long and so I asked them to take me out to see the world. So they took me to different places. We went out dancing, to massage parlours and nightclubs and things like that. Back in those days there were no karaoke or pubs. So I went and I was happy with them.

Interviewer: So this was during the Chula period?

Uthai: Yes. But there was something that bothered me and this was: true, I was happy but it was not the ultimate thing for me. So I asked to take me to more nightclubs. They would ask me, “Having fun?” and I’d reply, “Yes. Fun. But was there something even more fun?” It was as if in my mind I was telling myself that this is not enough, there was more. So they took me to more massage parlours and when I came down I smiled and I told my friend it was good fun. My friend asked me whether it was fun and I replied that it was. But in my mind [jai] I wondered whether there was something better? I felt that it did not yet fulfill my heart. They took me to everywhere where men should take men to. That passed eventually but the feeling always remained in my mind that there had to be something else, something more that I didn’t know. It was like ... it was not full-on enough for me. It was not enough happiness for me. If you ask me did I find some happiness, yes, I was quite happy but there must be more to it. So I asked my friends and they said that there was no more. They said they had taken me to everything that they could take me to. So when they said that I said, “Ok, if there no more then there’s no more.” But the feeling remained in my mind. But there was nothing I could do since there were no more things to try. So I forgot about it. Then it came to that point in my life [in the monastery]: “Ah! This is it! This is what had been bothering me.”

Interviewer: Was it spontaneous?

Uthai: It was that happiness then, “Ah, this is it!” So I stopped bhavana and went to see the teacher monk. I asked him, “Sir, what is this? What does this mean?” So I described the feelings and sensations. “I did as you say. What does it means since I’ve never experienced this happiness before, being really happy sitting there?” So he replied, “What you experienced is called piti,” which is dhamma speak and there are different kinds ... about 5 kinds. Then I asked about a particular one and he said that this feeling will happen when the mind is about to quieten down and find peace [sakob] and is the first stage. Ah, what did he say, “The first stage!” [laughs]. So I thought in my mind that if this is the first stage ..... that means that when I was nightclubbing I can't imagine what level that was! Not even close [laughs] ... So I said I don't know what level it was but even at this level I was very happy .... I mean really, really happy ... truly. The
previous experiences of happiness couldn’t even begin to compare with this happiness. This was what I was looking for, that had been missing four years ago and I didn’t know what to look for. And from that moment on, I began to search for it. And since there is a first stage there must be other stages. So that’s how I became interested. Before I was not interested at all. Before I threw dhamma books away [throwing a book on to the sofa] even though my grandmothers were nuns. They talked to us about dhamma but I only pretended to show interest out of politeness, but in my mind there was no interest.

Interviewer: So then you started seeking teachers?

Uthai: Yes. I started to seek where the teachers were. This is because now I could relate to the teachers. I could say, “I’ve done bhavana before and this is what happened.” OK. So I recount my experiences. I had a teacher ... I went to temples and monasteries. I went to a temple in Bangpra in Sri Racha. There was a teacher who was called Ajahn Chai Sujeewo. He was a forest monk and was disciple of Ajahn Mun and Ajahn Chah. But he was Mahanikaya [one of the two Buddhist sect in Thailand] but I didn't know or care what Mahanikaya or Dhammayud was. So I asked him how he practiced. I told him about my experiences and asked him what his advice was. He told me that I had the makings of a good practitioner and can follow him up the mountain. He had a retreat centre up the mountain, Khao Kiew, and there was a zoo up there as well. But it went up higher and further than where the zoo is. You need to use a Jeep to get up there, and you stay there and it was very quiet. There were small kutti [small hut] up there the size of this table: your head and feet would just fit in. It would open up on various sides ... in the middle of the forest. The kutti of the teacher was far away. So I was told that if in the middle of the night I heard something, don’t come down. Perhaps it was a trick of his ... to frighten me. When you are afraid, you have to bhavana. When people are afraid of something then they have to hold on to something ... anything. So I bhavana the whole night. I bhavana the whole night: “Buddho, buddho, buddho.” I stayed on that mountain for 5 days, and I experienced the feeling of great peace [sakob].

Interviewer: Did you ‘buddho’ while watching the breath?

Uthai: No, I didn’t watch the breath, just repeated ‘buddho.’

Interviewer: Recite by rote.

Uthai: Yes, that’s right. But sometime it could change to the breath ... anything as long as the two syllables word ‘bud-dho’ came out. You could watch the breath if you like.

Interviewer: And if thought arises?

Uthai: Then you would quicken the pace: ‘buddho, buddho’ [reciting at fast pace] ... quicken it so that you stay with the buddho. When I was up there it was very quiet, peaceful and very nice. I did walking meditation but not like Khun Mae
Siri’s style because it was faster walk with ‘buddho, buddho’ – just walking while reciting ‘buddho.’ I walked in the mosquito net because up there because there were a lot of mosquitoes. So there was a walking meditation path made of earth in front of the kutti which was quite long. At the night people would use this and it had a long mosquito net covering. This is like forest tradition to help prevent malaria and other diseases.

Interviewer: Was this your first teacher?

Uthai: Yes, that was my first teacher and that was the first time practicing in the forest. I was up there for 5 days. Very quiet. At the end of the 5 days I came down and there was commotion. Up there it was a paradise because it was so quiet. But when I came down my discomfort became very apparent. I could not bare any kind of loud noises. I would feel irritated even if I heard people talking. I told my teacher, “Not staying here ...” I couldn’t stand the noise of cars ... cars going ‘beep, beep’ because it was so irritating. I told the teacher, “I’d rather stay up there.” It was really like that. That was what I felt. But my teacher replied, “No, you can't stay up there. If you can stay up there then you must be able to stay down here.” But actually now I’m not sure if my teacher said that. I think I remembered that it was Khun Mae Siri who said it, “If you can stay there then you must be able to stay here as well.”

Interviewer: And how did you meet Khun Mae Siri?

Uthai: So after leaving my teacher I practiced using this method ‘buddho, buddho.’ One day I went to see my teacher ... told him this: “The bhavana practice of buddho is appropriate for quietening the mind, but I am a lay person and it would be impossible to ‘buddho, buddho’ like this all the time in daily life. It requires a great deal of time before recitation would put the mind to peace. Even to get the mind to quieten to the first level requires days.” It took me days. Monks and lay people therefore are not the same. Monks have a lot of time. They can go into their kutti’s and lock the door and bhavana but lay people like myself cannot do this ... people come and meet me like my secretary just here, etc. It’s too slow. I then asked if there was any other way for me to bhavana. So the teacher suggested: “Use the mind [chit] to know mind [chit]. The mind knowing the mind [chit ru chit]. This was the first time. The teacher used the term ‘mind knowing the mind’ which simply means ‘the knower.’ Now this is my terminology: I used the terms ‘finding the knower’ to interpret ‘mind knowing the mind.’ So the teacher told me to go with this method. This means knowing yourself all the time. Know the mind [jai] all the time wherever you go, for example when walking. [Uthai points to a placard written over 20 years ago] Know and feel the mind at all time.

Interviewer: When did this happen?

Uthai: About 20 years ago. Before I met Khun Mae Siri. I was practicing with the knower before I met her. So I wrote this down back then when they wanted to print some book or something. I wrote it then ... the knower that my teacher told
me about is the mind knowing the mind ... is about trying to be aware of mind all the time and never letting the awareness stray away from the mind. So I asked the teacher ... I’m the sort of guy that if I decide to do something then I really commit to it. Like the bhavana experience, I doubt if other normal people would do it like me ... the whole day. This is probably part of my personality. And likewise it was with the knower. So when I was told about the knower I stuck with the knower. For example when I’m holding something ... or talking with someone, like talking with you, I am trying to be aware of myself to the extent of making myself tense. Yes, I was really tense.

Interviewer: When you say you’re aware of yourself does that mean you’re aware of the body and the mind?

Uthai: Yes, aware of the mind. For me, I am only aware of the mind.

Interviewer: So you’re not concerned with the body?

Uthai: My awareness was only confined to the mind and not extended to the body. My awareness is centre only on one area and that is here in the mid chest ... just being aware only here. This is like a snake protecting its eggs – it was exactly like that. Supposing the eggs are here ... the snake is always vigilant of this and never letting the focus drift away from this area. So it was the same with me and I tried never to lose the focus ... all day. So think for yourself how it was like. This made me very tense. Tense, stiff and stressed! Wherever I went I was tense. I wasn’t using the ‘buddho’ bhavana mantra any more, but watching this area here instead.

Interviewer: What about thoughts?

Uthai: I was just aware of here. I just made sure I was aware of this area all the time ... like there is something touching and letting the touch stay.

Interviewer: Is the area where the mind or consciousness resides?

Uthai: They say that it is the spot number 9 is the mind. So I used just it. So everyone has different way of doing things ... but for me it was this spot. It was most convenient for me. For others it’s another place but not for me. So I really committed to it. It was very stressful: I would lose it sometime and it wouldn’t stay there. But I tried hard to keep it there and if it strayed I would put it back immediately. So I was stressed and it nearly damaged me. Because as I was doing this thoughts would appear, and these were what I viewed then as very bad thought: insults of the Buddha. My thoughts were vehement insults and criticism. It came out in such a way that I felt that the Buddha was right in front of me and I was berating him. And I could not stop it! It could not be stopped. It was something that tortured me. When I tried to be aware I found myself insulting the Buddha. But the good side in me was saying, “He is so wonderful. Why are you insulting him?” I replied, “Yes this is absolutely true but I can’t control it!” It was insulting and what can I do? I said to myself if it’s like this I should commit
suicide. It was that bad. The Buddha is great and why am I insulting him? I told it to stop but it didn’t. It refused to stop. At that time my total outlook was miserable ... absolutely miserable. Things were unstoppable.

Interviewer: Why did this happen and how do you remedy it?

Uthai: So I went to my teacher and told him, “I've done what you’ve told me with zeal and now I’m criticising the Buddha. What can I do?” He smile and said, “Ah ... you have the nature of a meditator” [laughs]. He really said that! You have the nature of a practitioner. People who don’t practice are not like this [laughs]. When he said this it was very funny and I told him, “What nature? It’s driving my crazy! Crazy!” It’s a very bad nature – it’s rotten, really terrible. So the teacher suggested, “Any time the insulting starts let it continue. Don’t try to stop it. Don’t stop it. Don’t hold it back. Let it go. If it wants to insult let it do so and see how long it can keep going.” So I told myself, “This is a strange suggestion.” So I went back and sat down and the insult began blurring out. I did not try to stop it: if it wants to slander go ahead. I watched and followed it. It kept going and going. After a long while ... insults, insults, insults ... why aren’t you holding back today? ... more insulting on and on. Didn't try to stop it ... can keep going. It stopped. It just stopped on its own. And I asked, “Is there any more?” [laughs] Yes, I asked, “Any more insults? Go ahead!” So more insults and more and more. So it stopped. Again I questioned, “Do some more, go ahead.” – like goading it on. Finally it ended. And from then on I knew the technique: this is the way, there is no control, just let it go, it just comes up on its own because it is my nature. This is my nature or habit which has been accumulated and with me. So it comes out and before I was unfamiliar with it so I worried over it. Therefore it got worse and worse. I disliked it but now I let go of the dislike and it ended. It stopped on its own. So I thought to myself, “I did not try to force it to stop and it stopped!” So from then on I used this tactic every time it slandered.

Interviewer: I’ve had similar experience as well and it doesn’t stop.

Uthai: It won’t stop ... won’t stop. Because things can’t be coerced. This is exactly according to the law: anicca, dukkha, anatta. Anatta and anicca means there is no control ... one cannot force things to happen. The law works in every situation. Even when it stopped and I said, “Is there any more?” more came out. So I challenged it, “Come out! I will watch you. Come out!” So in the end it knew and stopped.

Interviewer: But I’m fearful of bad karma.

Uthai: Yes it is the fear of karma that suppresses it even more. Fear is karma ... it’s call karma ... akusala [unwholesome] karma. More suppression and more suppression until it comes out. Therefore I used this method ... if I hadn’t met my teacher I would’ve had it tough ... very stressful. After that it was much better, and I just kept being aware of that area. Then after some time I met Khun Mae Siri.
Interviewer: When was this?

Uthai: I’ve known met Khun Mae Siri for 20 years. But before that I practiced from age 25 to 30.

Interviewer: Was Khun Mae in Bangkok then?

Uthai: No, she was in Korat.

Interviewer: So there were only a few students practicing with her then.

Uthai: My mother sent my wife first. Back in those days the practice as taught by Khun Mae was called ‘Yub nor pong nor’ [Falling, rising]. An older relative of mine asked my wife’s sister to go with her and then my sister-in-law asked my wife to go as well. They asked me whether I wanted to go but I said, ‘No, I’m not going. I’m already practicing.’ So they went and I thought to myself that when they return they will be like me, all stressed out and tense. But they came back smiling and I was puzzled – what is this? Did they did really go to meditation. How come they’ve come back smiling? [laugh] Back then I never smiled ... because I was tense watching here all the time [points to chest]. If you watch this area then you cannot smile. It was very difficult to smile. And they came back after a seven-day retreat and asked to go for seven more days. It was rather strange. Then one day I met Khun Mae Siri and she asked, “When will you come and practice with me for 7 days?” I told her, “I am already practicing,” and she replied, “Yes, I know because your complexion is very dark.” It was as if I was so tense that ... Khun Mae knew and also knew that my way was making my face go dark. So I said, “Yes I would like to practice your method but I didn’t go.” Why did I not go? Because the way I was practicing back then strongly reinforced my ego. I had a lot of ego [mana]. I felt that what I was doing was at university level but what my wife went through with Khun Mae was like nursery or primary school. So I felt like, “OK, you go ahead and go to primary school first. I’ve done it already.” So I told Khun Mae that since I was already practicing I don’t need to go. But she reiterated again, “Don’t worry. Please come.” So I was rather obliged ... my wife had already gone ... So I said, “OK, let’s do this ...” but although I felt obliged I still had a lot of ego. I said, “OK, I’m not going to your house but I will learn with you if you come to my house. I have a house in Sri Racha. I am inviting you to my house. If I have to go to your house then I will not feel comfortable because you have to do everything for me like cooking, etc. But at my house all you do is teach. So come to my house.” But in reality, I did not meant what I say at all. In reality, I did not want to go to Khun Mae’s house because I felt that what I was doing was university stuff already. Why should I have to go back to primary level again? But out of respect I sort of had to ask her: “Please come, come,” but it was not really sincere. In the end, Khun Mae came for seven days. So the only people at that retreat was myself and the rest were members of my family ... about 10 or so people. That was the first time. That was the first time Khun Mae was invited out of her Korat house.

Interviewer: That means you were the first to organise Khun Mae Siri retreat?
Uthai: Yes, that was around 20 years ago. The year was B.E. 2522. I invited her and she only taught - did nothing else. Before I entered the first retreat ... I’m the kind of person who when I to commit something, I do it to the max. Like when I was doing buddho I really committed to it the whole day. And when I was practicing ‘chit ru chit’ [mind knowing the mind] I dedicated my life to it - as it were. And the third one with Khun Mae this was different to the practices I had done before. The first day with Khun Mae I told her, “I have been practicing like this before but because of the kindness you have showed me I will do whatever ... whatever you say in these seven days. I will even abandon what I’ve done before if you say so.” I was ready to surrender to everything and be completely obedient because of her kindness during those seven days ... she was also teaching my mother. “In those seven days if any one comes to visit me I will not allow ... whatever you say I will obey.” And that is what I did. During those seven days I did not speak to anyone. I told all my business partners that everything will have to wait for seven days. So I did the walking meditation, “Right, moving; left, moving ...” and I sat meditating watching rising and falling of the stomach. Some people had told me that it was difficult to watch the belly move but I found it very easy – the moment I started I saw it clearly ... saw it immediately. I was slightly bemused by this ... what was the point of it? But Khun Mae told me to do it and I did it. I watched it very quickly ... when I sat down I immediately watched, “Rising, falling, rising ....” So that was one meditation technique, the practice of ‘Rising and falling.’ What did I gain from the experience? I gained this insight: with everything in the world, if you are attached to one side or another, it will push away the other side. For example if you like the colour red then you will not be content with another colour. It’s instantaneous. If you love peace and quiet then you will be unhappy with commotion. This is like when I was happy with the stillness up the mountain, and when I got down if I heard any kind of noise I would be annoyed. I would be irritated. Any loud noise would result in irritation. Liking peace means disliking commotion. So I was discovered this [tone signifying elation] and realised that this is the way things are. Therefore the reason why you are upset and irritated with one thing or another is because you like the opposite. The result is that if you like something then you will hate the other. If you like one kind of woman’s face then you will dislike the opposite. If you like women with fair complexion then you will dislike those with dark skin, automatically - you won’t want to look at them. “Oh this person is beautiful but this person is not.” This is the way nature works. This is known as ‘the natural way of duality.’ In this world there is always a duality, a opposite pair of things. Therefore one must practice... to alleviate the tension, like with using the knower ... or with Khun Mae doing walking meditation, as I watched the foot moving up the focus is on the foot ... it’s just there in that area. So, “Ah, this is how it is. This is how tension is released! I was tensed because I was so uptight. Like I was holding on to it too tightly. I was holding, focusing here in this area all the time. So if you focusing here all the time, soreness and tiredness will creep in. At first it’s like this ... then like this ... then like this [Uthai demonstrates by grasping my forearm and then tightening his grip in steps]. So I understood then that what Khun Mae was teaching was the same ... holding in the same way but this way
instead [Uthai demonstrates this by holding my forearm tightly and vice-versa holding lightly]. There is the same tension but there is reprieve.

Interviewer: So was this the first time you learnt to hold on lightly?

Uthai: Yes, it taught me to sometime let go and then hold again ... that was what I learnt practicing with Khun Mae Siri. Back then I held on very tightly. It was really tight. Really tight!

Interviewer: Holding on tightly to the mind (jai)?

Uthai: Yes the mind? Held on and never let go. So I learnt that, OK, this way was also possible! This is much more pleasant.

Interviewer: So you saw that another way was possible?

Uthai: Yes. But some people who practiced with Khun Mae become uptight. Too uptight. So there’s no one correct method. You have to work at it and then you must adjust for yourself how much from this method you want to take and how much from another ... to have the right mix for yourself. If someone asked me what is the best method I would say there is no best method. You should go and learn and then adjust for yourself to make it most comfortable for you.

Interviewer: So after meeting Khun Mae Siri did you learn more and develop the technique yourself?

Uthai: Yes. Yes. Must be up to the individual practitioner. Therefore I have many teachers but in the end ... you’ve got to combine all the teachers. Ajahn Chai my first teacher said that he had gone to learn in every place. He’s learnt the method of watching the belly [Yup nor pong nor] And slowness of action ... he’s been to a meditation school where they emphasise doing things very slowly ... like moving very slowing ... and he took it as far as possible, for example, when soaping and showering ... would take forever. He said, oh, it would take nearly the whole day! And when trying to get into bed, lifting the mosquito net ... when monks go into the forest they sleep in the mosquito net … my teacher learnt to lift the mosquito net slowly, slowly while being mindful all the time ... but before he could get in, all the mosquito would have entered already. All the mosquito have entered because ‘Lifting, lifting, lifting ...’ like this! It’s very slow so all the mosquitoes go in. They’ve all gone in! Yes, my teacher did it to that level! Therefore he told me that he had read about all the different methods ... like lighting a fire and focusing on it ... he’s done all that. And one day he was confused, “What teacher should I use today? I practiced according to this teacher and then changed and then changed again.” It never worked. So he decided that he will put all the teachers together and he did it. And from that he got his method [chit ru chit]. And therefore this is what he taught me. Taught me about the knower ... which is call ‘chit ru chit.’ So he combined all his teachers. So I thought of him and I combined all my teachers too: Khun Mae and the knower turned into ... and I became at ease and relaxed [sabai] ... in the present ... just knowing ... doesn’t matter what.
I can just sit and moving about and from then on it became easy and so comfortable. The face that never had a smile on it changed and I accepted other views more easy ... less argumentative. Before even when I was practicing if anybody criticised me I got very upset. I was practicing *chit ru chit* but back then I was practicing what’s known as *samatha*.

Interviewer: Since then ... how is your happiness now?

Uthai: I enjoy things. I am not suffering. When you are in the present all the time, the thinking falls into place .... I don’t cause any harm. For example, in business or attitude to life ... I believe that everybody born into this world is like all of us. Everybody wants to be successful. So suppose they teach you about business. I sell moon cakes. Usually, I estimate the amount we’re going to sell this year, for example, one million pieces which we have to make beforehand. Moon cakes only sell during the festive period. Therefore on the last day of the festive period the volume of cakes sold is enormous – lots of people buy, a huge quantity sold. So on this day you will know whether your estimate was correct or incorrect. So if you make a mistake you will not have enough to sell and there will be a shortage and an opportunity lost. And if you make the opposite mistake, you have too much which will go to waste. So what will you do? Like yesterday, I sold out because I underestimated the demand; there was a shortage especially of the fillings that people wanted ran out, but other fillings remained but not much even then. In economic thinking this is a great opportunity loss. Why? Because competitors will take advantage since they have product and you don’t, and so they can sell and their name will become more well-known. This is business thinking. But I don’t think that way. I think if I estimate this amount I’m very happy to sell everything, and others will have opportunities. So others can have opportunities as well! I think like that. I think differently to others! I think differently to what others think.

Interviewer: But what happen if there is some leftover. I assume there have been times when this has happened ...

Uthai: Yes. If there is some left, then very happy. We will discount 50% so more people can have the opportunity to eat our cakes. It’s really is like this: I can take it any way it comes. Because in reality, *dhammachart* [natural reality] is any way it comes. Isn’t this true? *Dhammachart* that I told you about is duality and hence if there is a shortage there will always be leftovers. Even if there was not enough, and you get angry you can’t do anything anyway. Therefore you should be happy with it and sell. Other people will sell ... they will sell anyway, so you should be happy for them too, that they too have the opportunity to sell and open shop. Will you sell only on your own? This is very selfish. The customers will now have opportunity to compare the products, “So this product is so and so ...” This is fair enough. *Dhammachart* working this way is really fair. There is no taking advantage of each other. In reality, there can be no taking advantage at all. Everything is fair. *This* is really dhamma. There is no thinking about taking advantage of each other, not even a little.
Interviewer: This kind of thinking, did you gradually accumulate it?

Uthai: Yes, it gradually emerged. It emerged like this: when you practice a lot of, mindfulness [kwam ru tua] will increase and increase. Then understanding will arise on its own ... it is trying to maintain and protect the practitioner’s mind [jai] so that it remains joyous at all time. This is the real key. What will you do in order to maintain the mind in a joyous state, and move in the same way as dhammachart? It will happen automatically ... you will think in such a way as to try and protect and maintain the mind in joyous state the whole day.

Interviewer: So is this the way you think whatever the topic or situation? Is this correct?

Uthai: My thinking will be in such a way that ... it will follow the rule... it will think in line with the rule. In some circumstances, when they say think positively that is correct but in certain situations it does not follow the rule. For example, if I was driving a car and a taxi cuts in front of me some people will think negatively and swear. Others will think positively which can occur in these ways:

1. “The taxi has a job of taking passengers and their time is valuable. Therefore I’ll let the taxi go.”
2. “OK, let him go – so he can go to hell!”

There are different degrees of positiveness. But it will in tune with dhammachart more and more. The first time: “I’ll let him go. I don’t care ... perhaps he can go and crash!” but at least you’re now more positive and not swearing at taxi. Next time might think: “Their job is as taxi driver and their time is more valuable than mine.” But to think really in line with dhammachart then you must understand that there is a duality in everything. On the road, there are always those that drive fast and those that drive slowly, and those that are patient and those that are hot-blooded. So if you see a patient driver in front of you, there are others who are hot-blooded. That’s really it.

Interviewer: So you see dhammachart in reality. This is the dhammachart of traffic for drivers.

Uthai: In reality, there must be pushing and shoving on the roads. There must be honking horns and blinking of lights, etc. This is life on the roads. If we are mindful then we will understand.

Interviewer: You see it.

Uthai: But for those who are not mindful, then these things will go and stimulate places where negative actions can come out.

Interviewer: Are you saying that if we are mindful then we will see dhammachart in daily life?
Uthai: Yes, everything ... because everything is dhammachart. There are people who speak fast and those who speak slowly. There are people who incite us and those that pacify. It's always like this. Dhammachart is like this. There will people like you who come along and there will be those that are not like you. So you will see one side ... and you will see that it's only one side and there's another. There is always this kind of thinking.

Interviewer: If we see dhammachart ...

Uthai: When you see the other side [that you don't like] you are happy when it comes because you anticipated it. For example, if I like receiving money ... so when I get money I'm very happy. But if a person doesn't understand dhammachart then that person will be attached to receiving money. But in dhammachart one day you will lose money e.g. a bill arrives back at your home. When you arrive at the office, you receive your salary and so very happy and you go and buy friends a meal but one day when you go home the bills arrive e.g. water, electricity, credit cards, etc., then there will be an opposite reaction because you decided to like the occurrence of receiving salary or bonus - this is negative karma immediately. Therefore for those who really understand or practice this all the time then when they receive the salary immediately they know that soon they will have to lose some. It's always like this. Sati will warn you that there is not only one side. So when you get back home, then you are happy as what you already anticipated in the morning have arrive [the bills]. Absolutely right. Dhammachart is like this.

Interviewer: If we really understand dhammachart then you will be able to protect your mind [jai]. Is this correct?

[Small pause as Uthai sets up his laptop computer. He does not answer the question directly]

Uthai: This is my work. This is very easy. I thought about how to get people to understand in the easiest way. Have you heard my talk on 'arahant turning over the palm of his hand'?

Interviewer: Yes, many times.

Uthai: That example I thought of in 5 minutes... Really. That was back at my house 20 years ago. Khun Mae was forced to go to a ceremony and one of her assistants wanted me to talk instead as I was the host. I didn’t want to but she insisted. So I was forced to and I went into my room for 5 minutes and had to come up with something. So I thought of this ‘arahant turning over the palm.’

Interviewer: The first time I heard it I liked it very much.

Uthai: I like it even more now because it's something ... [referring to his Powerpoint presentation as he plays with it].
Interviewer: Have you written any books or articles?

Uthai: No, I don’t like to write but like this sort of thing [referring computer presentations]. So I will present you summary lessons about life. It will go in steps. [Playing with the computer]. I will start with the iron law of dhammachart. The dhammachart that applies to all of us, you and me and everything, there is no exception. No one can escape it. Even bin Laden digging holes however deep cannot escape it, or if you are an astronaut in deepest space with rockets that power you to Mars or Jupiter you cannot escape the iron law. I term it ‘iron’ law because you cannot escape from it. This law is the law of karma which you will be familiar with. Most people have heard of the law of karma but there are several details in it that one should know. The first principle is that we create karma at every moment. Many people think that in one day we create karma only a few times, like in the morning giving alms to the monks results in good karma. But in the afternoon they have an argument with the spouse and they think that this is bad karma. This means that karma only occurs one or two times a day. But this is not true! In fact we create karma every moment. Why do we create karma every moment? Because we create karma with these ways [pointing to chart in computer]. Look at it ... this is what’s going on. People think we generate karma only in this way. For example, the alms giving ... the karma that results from it is only 0.01% ... of all the karma. But here [in the mind] this is where karma occurs the most. [Refers to slide ppt #4 – it refers to 99.98% of karma through the mind i.e. our thoughts, 0.01 through speech and 0.01% through the body]. Why do I say that we create karma all day, at every moment ... because karma occurs mostly in the mind. And why does karma occur in the mind the most? Because we are always thinking; feeling are constantly arising; emotions are constantly arising; thoughts come all the time. [see slide 5] People think that this, this and this is not karma but in fact these are the real karma.

Interviewer: Real karma.

Uthai: Yes. The real thing. Happens all the time. Therefore people don’t fully understand karma. Therefore the first rule is that we generate karma at every moment. For example, I am generating karma at this moment. Maybe I’m thinking, “When will this be over?” but I also might think, “OK, I’ll help him. He’s makes a lot of sense.” Like we’re not really aware but these karmic actions occur all the time. This is the way it works. The second principle of karma is ... everyone knows this ... good actions lead to good results and bad actions lead to bad results, but the third principle not everyone knows [in powerpoint: actions accumulate, accumulation turns into habits, habits turns into your behavioural core. This principle causes the cycle of rebirths. This principle is so important because it accounts for 99.98% of karma: good feelings lead to good results; good thoughts lead to good results; and, good emotions leads to good results. Those who don’t emphasise this but only take care of the second principle (good actions lead to good results and bad actions lead to bad results) think that if I go and hit somebody then that will produce bad results ... but they don’t know that good feelings and thoughts will produce good results. Good emotions also produce good results. This is the key because we are alone in our own world
most of the time but we are unconscious: we’re angry or if we don’t get what we want we’re annoyed. This invites further consequences.

Interviewer: Is that because it leads to action?

Uthai: In fact it leads from here then to here ... going from here will result in speech. So this is the third principle ... most people don’t know it ... that karmic actions accumulate. Someone who has a bad temper ... when he sees something he gets angry easily, and it will keep going like this. But some people are very calm and so they accumulate calmness. If they accumulate a lot then little can get to them. But for some people even seeing a dog walking past can get them angry ... but for others it’s no big deal. That’s because people accumulate karma differently.

Interview: Behavioural core [sundaan] is accumulated over many life times.

Uthai: It is very difficult to uproot because the behavioural core is very tough, deep and solid. That’s why it’s called the behavioural core. But it can be uprooted.

Interviewer: It can be changed.

Uthai: Yes, it can be changed. Therefore the third principle is that the fruit of action accumulates. People think that once an action finishes then what’s done is done. Wrong! In fact, it accumulates like one more unit. Like a mud on a pig’s tail, it grows more and more. You might not see that it’s growing but it does, bit by bit. The reason it can grow so big is because it accumulates slowly bit by bit. Therefore there are three principles which you must understand. When is there accumulation? There is accumulation all the time on the good side and the bad side. It’s very easy. Accumulating the good deeds will result in good birth and vice-versa. So this is the norm. It is dhammachart. So where can you reborn? I’ll show this is a chart of the different realms ... what you accumulate leads to rebirth in different realms [See slides 10-11, Uthai explains this subsequently]. This leads to this and this leads to this ... e.g. being unconscious leads to rebirth as animals, sila practice leads to human rebirth, the practice of sila and dana leads to rebirth in heaven realms, bhavana practice leads to brahma realm. [See Slide 11]. I understood about bhavana when I started buddho practice. I wondered why things affected me and I got angry and annoyed and I realised that I was attached to the peace created.

Interviewer: Do you mean that you can experience what it is like to be a brahma in this lifetime?

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1 A being of the non-sensual heavens (include form or formlessness states). According to Theravada Buddhism, brahmas inhabit the top worlds of existence (31 in total).
Uthai: Yes, yes because bhavana is accumulated. One day I practiced with intensity and see what happens. And my body disappeared. My body ceased to exist! I really had that feeling. So I can confirm it because I’ve experienced it. So I can say with confidence because when I started doing bhavana before I met Khun Mae Siri I really did it seriously and a lot. And this occurred. This experience happened to me. I didn’t realise it at the time but when I read it I immediately recognised it. I read about it afterward and not before. Or maybe I heard it from one of the teacher and then knew what it was called. So I was then able to write about it and show people the consequences of things you accumulate.

Interviewer: So a lot of this is from your experience. I didn’t realise.

Uthai: And everything else that I speak about as well. These things are not from the Tripitaka but are from my real experiences. So it’s very easy. You should accumulate everything that is good. However, in dhammachart there is another iron law ... if there was only the law of karma then we would only accumulate good deeds but there is unfortunately another law that makes it hard to accumulate good deeds. This law is the three characteristics of existence. Everybody knows them: anicca, dukkha and anatta. Everybody who has studied dharma knows them but other people don’t know. They don’t know about them at all. So therefore I have to talk to them about the law of duality instead: there’s good and bad, gaining and losing, arrival and farewell, birth and death, men and women ... whatever it is, it’s always in pairs.

Interviewer: Did this law of duality emerge with practice or did you study it somewhere?

Uthai: The law of duality ... maybe I’ve heard sermons, but before arriving at the law of duality I studied the three characteristics of existence. I understand the three characteristics of existence but to tell ordinary people about them I think it would be impossible. Therefore I wanted to explain to others ... suppose you were an ordinary person you’d understand easily that there’s good and bad, there’s gain and lost ... but if it was ‘everything is impermanent,’ ‘everything is empty of existence,’ would you understand this?

Interviewer: No, I wouldn’t understand.

Uthai: No, you wouldn’t. But if I said that there was arrival you’d understand that there’s bound to be farewell as well. Therefore the point is how to explain my understanding to others ... so that anybody can understand not just monks. Even monks sometimes don’t understand. Empty of existence, what does it mean? What does it mean? Empty of existence means that things can be anything. One moment it’s this and the next it’s changed. One moment it’s this and the next it’s changed; therefore there is no existence. Empty of existence means that there is no real, permanent existence. For example, if you look like this at present but what about in 20 years time, what will it be like? It doesn’t exist because it’ll change. It’s died. That look has gone. Therefore that means that it’s never
 existed. But most people won’t understand. Won’t understand, “Yes, it exists. Why do you say it doesn’t?” Therefore I used the law of duality instead. Everything in the world exists as pairs. Therefore there is a rule in this world called the Eight Winds of the World (*Lokadhamma*). Have you heard about it? The Eight Winds of the World are the basic properties of the world consisting of 4 pairs and 8 elements. Wherever you are born, in any era - the dinosaur period, the Roman Empire, Mesopotamia or even later on when we find extraterrestrials - once born you will always encounter the basic properties of the world consisting of 4 pairs and 8 elements always without any exception. Therefore the Eight Winds are intrinsic properties of the world. These consist of:

1) gain, when you receive money which is paired with 2) loss;
3) fame and 4) defamation;
5) praise and 6) ridicule;
7) joy and 8) sorrow.

These are the 4 pairs that are the permanent properties of the world. Everyone born into this world will encounter them without exception. It doesn’t matter how high or rich you are or how poor you are, you will experience them. It’s fair game for everyone. However, even if you know that these 4 pairs exist, most of us ... everyone ... when we do something good like giving alms we still wish for ... I ask you, in those 8 things how many things do we wish for? Everyone who I’ve met replies, “4 things: gain, fame, praise and joy.” Only 4 things are requested. Even when monks bless they only provide these 4 as blessings. But I ask whether the four other things will come? I ask everyone whether they will come? They all reply, “They will come.” And I emphasise further, “Will they come for sure, 100% certainty?” The answer is, “Definitely.” So I say, “Since they will all come, the next time be brave and ask for all 8!” And I demonstrate to them immediately by saying, “I wish to get money and lose money ...” I demonstrate for all to see. Anyone who is brave enough to do this, anyone who dares to ask for all 8 things ... that person will be the happiest person in the world. This is what I tell them. Why will that person be the happiest person in the world? Because one day someone will ridicule me and on that day you will be very happy because, “Are you ridiculing me? Wait a minute? Here it is. I’ve asked for it!” Isn’t this true ... asking for the natural way of things. You’ll say, “Thanks, today I’ve completed all the 8 things. I had 7 but now you’ve completed everything. I thank you.” You should thank the person!

Interviewer: Have you encountered this yourself?

Uthai: Sure, and I said, “Thank you very much.” This is like the story about Ajahn Chah. One day some disciples were with him and he was building a new chapel. So they were inspecting the chapel and there was a crack in the wall. So when the disciples saw this they said, “Oh, it’s cracking already.” Ajahn Chah replied, “This is the reason why Buddhism was born.” This is what he actually said! He didn’t say, “Let’s get the builder in.” He said, with just this crack, “It is because of cracks that Buddhism came into being.” Do you understand?

Interviewer: Yes.
Uthai: It’s that simple! That simple! Imagine what his mind must be like ... that he can think such a thing. This is dharma. Saw it so clearly.

Interviewer: He saw everything as *dhammachart*.

Uthai: If a perfect wall can exist then cracks must also exist. This is all it took for the Buddha to be born and Buddhism came about ... because we weren’t able to understand but the Buddha could, that the real nature of things consists of duality like this. Therefore anyone who understands will not be affected by things as they realise there are always pairs and you will get both. If you ask for only the 4 things then you will waver all the time because sooner or later you will get those opposite things. You will be always be weary, your mind unsteady. If you desire people to praise you but one day some people will ridicule you in your face or behind your back. Suppose you are a businessman and a friend comes and tell you that so and so were saying bad things about you ... even if you didn’t hear it in person, you would be shaken ... shaken. Emotions would rise up and these would not be good karma. So bad karma would be accumulated. It’s like that.

Interviewer: So suppose that happened what would you do?

Uthai: It will happen automatically. Automatically. It will go, “Uupp ... uupp!” Will realise that this is just normal. Just normal way of things. It must be like this. For those that have trained to the level of *arahant* it will happen immediately. Disappear immediately. They understand the nature of things ... like Ajahn Chah ... he did not feel any dislike toward the builder. There was not even a tracer of the word ‘builder.’

Interviewer: If I was just a regular person, not enlightened ...

Uthai: Then an “Uupp” must come up first and then understand with *sati* ... understand. It may take 15 seconds but that is OK and better than leaving things untended for hours. Suppose a person sees the crack in the building, that person might say, “Call in the builders. This is no good. How can you do this, etc.” This goes on and on and bad karma accumulate all the time, in heaps. The state of mind is always defiled.

Interviewer: In your business activities, there will be hundreds of things that come into your life.

Uthai: You must adjust accordingly. You must train. You see that this is so and so, this person is such and such ... like that. People are just like that. You can't expect people to be the same. You have to seek understanding and reason to adjust your mind. It’s just like playing a video game. You must keep the hero alive and moving ... all the time. So it’s the same with our mind: must maintain it in a happy state whatever happens. There are different ways and if one doesn’t work then use others, but one must adjust according to the dualistic law of nature.
Interviewer: Have you become much better over the last 20 years?

Uthai: It’s like you playing tennis. If you play with a professional the first day will be pretty awful. But if you play with him everyday you’ll get closer and closer to him. For me, I’m playing with dhammachart and therefore I will get closer to dhammachart as the days goes on. And one day you will play like the tennis professional that you practice with everyday – for sure. For me, I practice not just everyday but every instance! Dhammachart will ensure that you will move with it. What you practice everyday ... of mindfulness, sati and sampajana ... is like practicing with the best tennis professional. It’s just up to you whether you practice or not.

Interviewer: In the beginning were there times when you weren’t able to practice or was lost for whatever reasons?

Uthai: Yes. But after a while of practicing then it returns back to what I described. It just returns to that way of thinking. It seemed quite easy. I don’t know how it came about like this. I’m quite amazed how all this came about. So I tried to find ways so that others can understand like I have.

[He refers to slide 15]

‘How do we prevent our mind from being shaken in order for us to accumulate only good karma?’

‘There is only one way: to be mindful at all time.’

This is all you have to do. Really that’s all! Nothing more than this. From morning to evening. Whatever you do, whoever you are ... doesn’t matter. But what you must do is know what you are doing at all times. This is in order to keep the mind joyous at all time. This is very important. When you are not mindful then sorrow creeps in. Sorrow just creeps in. Mindfulness allows you to see dhammachart that consists of pairs ... so you can see all the different things that come and understand that the opposite will also come too, sooner or later. And when it comes you will just know it. If someone says nice things to you, you know that the opposite will also happen. Sati will warn you. The straight definition of sati is ‘call back’ – calling back to yourself or coming back to yourself. Sampajana means ‘being present’ and being in line with dhammachart. Therefore sati will bring us back and sampajana will help us understand and get in line with dhammachart ... at all times.

Interviewer: How has your happiness changed over the years from the beginning as a youth to now?

Uthai: The happiness then ... when there was piti there was happiness ... but it was a happiness that constantly changed. Any day that I could not achieve piti I would be frustrated ... because I did not understand the concept of pairs.
Therefore I would be frustrated because I wanted to go into deep meditation but it wouldn’t happen. It wouldn’t happen every time. Why? I didn’t know why even though I practiced exactly the same. But it wouldn’t happen. I would be frustrated. I couldn’t fathom it even though I was able to achieve a deep level of meditation ... it was still changing all the time. Then sometimes I might go and blame other things like too much noise or someone’s cooking is producing strong smell. I would blame. So if I hadn’t come to that realisation then I wouldn’t be able to come to terms with it. There would be no balance because I would always be bias toward one side. So I would have tried to achieve only one side even though the other side was unavoidable. And when you want something really badly then the opposite will come with greater frequency. It’s always like that ... one moment you’re happy but soon sorrow will visit. If a monk gave you some coins and then you said to him that you only want head and not tail then he would reply that coins contain both head and tail at the same time. Therefore you can’t have only head and since you ask for it you must take tail as well. Therefore if you get something good then other things will also appear – always happens. You can’t get only good things ... it’s impossible in this world! So I see it. So if you want something you must prepare for the opposite as well. This is the real thing, the real dhammachart. Even if you can go into deep meditative state where there is absolute peace – that’s good because you know that peace is attainable – but if you are attached to it or get too content with it, you will hate the opposite. An one day you will meditate but you won’t find any peace. But while you meditate and you attain peace you think that you can do it the next day but in fact it won’t happen. If you are content with this situation you have a mistaken belief – you don’t understand dhammachart.

Interviewer: When you have a good session meditating you want more of it the next time, but it doesn’t work usually.

Uthai: No, doesn’t work. This is the rule. This is Buddhism. The Buddha was the first person to understand this rule and taught others: when we meet things that exist as pairs the mind becomes unstable ... whatever your religion. Unless you have a method for dealing with it you will suffer.

Interviewer: What about in your marriage and family life?

Uthai: Yes, the rule is the same. It’s in everything ... near and far. Like sometimes we have arguments or my wife says things sweetly but I don’t like it, “Why is she using a sweet tone today?” ... even though she is sweet ... “Is she deceiving me?” Sometimes it might be the other way round. Or she might dress in one way and I don’t like it, even though yesterday she dressed similarly and I liked it. It’s not stable because of this rule.

Interviewer: What has this understanding done for your family life?

Uthai: It’s like this. I’ll tell you. She was always the way she was and I was the way I was.
Interviewer: Your wife told me that happiness in marriage life was not something with great ups and downs.

Uthai: It’s up to the individual. Some people have a lot of extreme happiness and sadness. Let’s put it this way: anyone who has lots of extreme happiness will suffer lots of extreme sadness. It always goes in pairs. If you throw a ball hard then it will come back hard. The harder you throw the harder it rebounds back. If you are very sweet as a couple ... I’ve seen many couples ... phoning all the time, and talking and talking. I forecast that these couples won’t stay together very long. I’ve told my wife when I say these couples, “Watch out!” The sweeter the couple, the sooner the break-up. And it’s like that in reality. If you want to last a long time then you must ... I told my wife several times, “Let’s be friends.” So we didn’t seek anything great. So because we didn’t seek there was nothing much that could come back and harm us. It really is like that. You have to understand the way things are.

Interviewer: In practicing and studying dharma, what is your purpose in life?

Uthai: I don’t have any purpose in life, but I have an objective at all times: How do I achieve a harmonious and happy mind? That’s all! That’s all. That’s it!

Interviewer: What about the fruit of magga?

Uthai: I don’t believe it. If someone says, “You’ve achieved it,” I don’t believe it. I don't care about it.

Interviewer: What about enlightenment?

Uthai: Enlightenment? Whether it exists or not I have no idea but this is what I want: I want to be harmonious and happy at all times. So you can see that is what I'm trying to do as we speak. I try to maintain harmony of mind. So it's like this ... but this rule always exists so don't believe anything too easily.

Interviewer: So you never think about enlightenment at all when you practice or go to retreats?

Uthai: Enlightenment is one word that came out and I understand it as having a harmonious and happy mind all the time. I don’t view enlightenment as anything more ... or as a goal that I must achieve. I don't view it that way. I look at enlightenment in the way that if I have a happy and harmonious mind all the time ... some people might view as so lofty ... too lofty. But for me it’s nothing. Whether it exist or not I have no idea but I try to maintain my mind but holding on to the 2 rules. I do not think about enlightenment ... I don’t talk about it as this or that.

Interviewer: Khun Mae ...
Uthai: But don’t quote me about this because it’s personal. Some wish for enlightenment but not for me. I don’t usually wish for it. I prefer to wish metta for others but wishing for enlightenment as is done in retreats I don’t usually say it or wish it. Hardly at all. And when I ... and this is something that nobody knows ... when I say prayers I don’t sit and pray but rather I walk and pray. So I just do walking meditation and pray. I don’t sit in front of the Buddha and pray.

Interviewer: What do you pray for?

Uthai: So that I have good mindfulness ... and I do walking meditation.

Interviewer: So it’s another way of being mindful.

Uthai: Walking meditation made me understand the meaning of prayers. When I pray I use translated prayers so I understand the meaning ... that the Buddha attain enlightenment ... freed from defilements, etc. So I understand. And there is another thing that I understood, the heart of Buddhism. When the Buddha gained enlightenment ... I haven’t spoken about this anywhere at all because this thought just came up. The Buddha gained enlightenment at around 3am in the morning. At 1am he gained the first stage where he was able to trace back all the lives he was born. The Buddha could go back to millions of lives he was born in. He could see that he had been accumulating merits for a very long time and he saw the endless cycle of rebirths: millions upon millions. That was the first stage of enlightenment. During the second stage at 2am he knew the karma that caused the kind of rebirth. Supposing that he was born a dog then he would know the specific karma that cause rebirth as a dog. What did he do that resulted in being born a dog. So he knew everything about causes and the types of karma e.g. what caused a leg to be broken. So he knew it through and through - everything. So he could foretell things. It’s like looking into the hard disk and seeing what was inside from the very beginning, the beginning of the mind. All the information is in the hard disk which would be released accordingly. Therefore it was possible to tell what was going to happen next because the hard disk is there. So he knew everything because he could trace back far, far back ... the whole hard disk, not just scanning 0.01% of it. If we could only get just 0.01% we would be very happy but he did it all. The third stage is the most important because in the second stage he knew what kind of karma or what kind of thinking causes certain rebirths and how karma accumulates. But the third stage is most important and in this stage he knew that there was one kind of karma that would not cause the hard disk to accumulate. It will stop the accumulation process. So he knew all the karma and their impact on all the rebirths, and then he understood one kind of karma that would not result in rebirth – there would be no continuation of the process. And this type of karma is ... here it is: the four foundations of mindfulness every instance [pointing to text on computer screen]. It must be done at every mind moment. So these are the 3 stages of Buddhism. The first he recalled all his previous lives. Second he understood what karma caused what and how they accumulate. Lastly, he knew the last aspect of dharma because dharma occurs at every moment ... at every, every moment ... but what kind of karma can we do that does not result in rebirth. So this was it,
four foundations of mindfulness. That's it! Whatever you call it ... nirvana ... whatever, I don't care. But you just do this and you can't wish for huge amounts of happiness because if you did then you just fall back.

Interviewer: So this is the path that you try to follow.

Uthai: I think that it follows logic ... that this is logical. There must be one type of karma that doesn't cause aggravation. It must be a karma that can be done all the time and must have a special quality ... must be done all the time ... because we generate karma all the time, don’t we? Karma accumulates there, you must accumulate it all the time ... this special karma. So trying to find it there isn’t anything else but only the four foundations of mindfulness. There’s nothing else. For example, you can’t accumulate praising people all the time. This is impossible! I think, ‘What is it that can be accumulated all the time?’ and there is nothing else apart from this. Nothing else. Only four foundations of mindfulness. You can do it all the time. You can do kaya [the body], the vedana [painful feeling], chit [mind] or dhamma [mind-objects]. So you can observe the body, or observe pain whether there’s pain or not and what kind, or you can observe the mind whether it’s happy or not or frustrated or whatever. If you move your body then you know about it. Your feelings you know about it. And dhamma ... well that’s about knowing the state of things as pairs, for example, if the mind is wandering well you don’t have to do much because soon it will be at peace. The opposite will come always. Same with body ... one moment it might be elevated but the next it will fall down ... don’t worry. With the last one of dhamma, you must know that if you’re glad about something then very soon it won’t last and will disappear. These four things ... kaya, vedana, chit and dhamma. So there must be four ... the four foundations of mindfulness. So you observe the movement of the body, and the movement of painful sensations, and the movement of the mind ... when there is peace or absence of peace when meditating. Finally dhamma. Why must it be the last item? To make sure we understand that the first three are impermanent and changeable. Dhamma means to understand the three characteristics of existence. The body is forever changing; it’s never staying the same. Same with feelings ... sometime there is happiness and then sorrow, sometime tight but sometime relaxed. The dhamma must look after us all the time in order to maintain harmony and happiness of the mind. The dhamma practice is about knowing the nature of reality as it is. The only way is the four foundations of mindfulness at every instance. If you can do it you will be very happy. Therefore I’ve written about ‘Good worldly people’ [referring to PowerPoint presentation] because I’ve invited many of my friends to 7-day retreats but they say, “I’m already a decent person. I’m already a good person and I don’t need to go to retreats.” Is that so and so I say to them that if you are good, 1) do you abide by the precepts? They say reply, “Yes.” OK, 2) Do you give alms? Yes, OK. 3) Do you ever get stressed? And they all say, “Yes, I still feel stressed.” So I said, “OK, so if you’re still stressed ... anyone who is still stressed, no matter how good, has the ability to transform into a nasty person. Believe me.” Because minor stress can turn into big-time stress if the mind is not looked after. For example, if someone cuts in front of you while driving do you still curse at them, even though you were driving in your own lane. Do you still
feel bitterness toward a taxi who cuts in front of you while driving in your own lane? One day you might change into a bad person. If you are cut in front often then things can turn sour ... can even shoot a person. Therefore it’s true that you might be a good worldly person ... but you’re still creating good and bad karma and are still in the cycle of rebirths. On the other hand there are good people that knows the dharma and practice mindfulness with sati. These people will not be easily frustrated or stressed ... will not be affected by good or evil. If you delight in good things happening then you will also find great sadness when bad things occur. The reality is like this ... all the time. If you’re really happy about something be sure to know that unhappiness of the opposite extreme will come soon. Therefore in family life you have to choose. What do you want? Do you want extremes? If you want extreme happiness then you must prepare for extreme unhappiness.

Interviewer: My wife likes absolutely peace and quiet and doesn’t like noise at all.

Uthai: That’s not good. Because if you don’t like something means you must like something else. If you love peace and quiet then you will hate commotion and noise. This is not good. Your mind will not be harmonious. It means you are a good worldly person. Like when I was up the mountain and came down, I thought to myself, “I’ve practice well and good but why do I still feel irritated?” This is not right. I had to find an answer and eventually I did. Ah! This reality of things is like this! This really is the reality of things! Therefore I have to ask for both peace and commotion – had to do that. But the real key is not whether there is peace or commotion; the key is whether sati exists or not. Do you come back to yourself quickly or not because there are always pairs of things. This is the real key of things. I never emphasise that there must be utter silence and peace. I’m quite indifferent to these things. Just know that they exist. And that commotion also exists. The more at peace you are the more ill at ease you become when things change. Strong emotions will come out for those people who have deep peace. The deeper the peace the nastier the anger when it comes out. It’s quite a sight! It’s not how much you sit and meditate. This is really not the point. The important thing is whether you are mindful or not.

Interviewer: Thank you very much for the interview.

Poem

This poem was written over 20 years ago but is still found on a framed placard in Uthai’s office. I was able to photocopy it. It is written elegantly in Thai. Unfortunately, even my best effort in translation can do it no justice.
Look into Yourself

Wake up, open your eyes, find the knower;
Learn from teacher, words of Buddha, guard diligently;
Keep mindful, in front of you, in the present;
Happiness eternal, awaits you, why wait;
However lived, whatever life,
no change needed, hope you know;
Knower, mindfulness, add them both;
Do it well, every instance, even better;
Dawn 'til dusk, keep vigilant, wonders cometh soon;
This way, true to those, who practice;
Ethics, concentration, wisdom, virtue
all rise, in our mind, so come try.

Powerpoint Presentation

Uthai used this Microsoft Powerpoint presentation as an aid in the interview. It was already on his laptop’s hard disk and he indicated that he used it often to present dharma to others. He gave me a copy of the file. The original is in Thai and the translation is mine. Diagrams and colours replicate the originals.

Slide 1

Summary Notions of Life

by Uthai

Slide 2

Iron laws of dhammachart
• covers all groups of beings
• law of karma

Slide 3

First principle of law of karma
• simple and short: “We generate karma every moment”

Slide 4

Which ways do we generate karma?
   o through bodily action   0.01%
   o through speech         0.01%
   o through the mind       99.98%
Slide 5

Because we have

Feelings

Emotions

Thoughts

All the time

Slide 6

Second principle of law of karma
- good action leads to good results; bad action leads to bad results
- good speech leads to good results; bad speech leads to bad results

- good feelings
- good thoughts
- good emotions
  \[ \text{good results} \]

- bad feelings
- bad thoughts
- bad emotions
  \[ \text{bad results} \]

Slide 7

Third principle of law of karma
- once committed, karma accumulates
- a lot of accumulation produces habit
- accumulation of habits produces behavioural core

Slide 8

What is accumulated?
**Good karma:** dana (generosity), sila (ethics/precepts), bhavana (mental development)
**Bad karma:** lobha (greed), dosa (hatred), moha (delusion)

Slide 9

- accumulating much **good karma** results in **good birth**
- accumulating much **bad karma** results in **bad birth**
Slide 10

States of existence

States of Happiness:  
- Formless realm - 4
- Form realm - 16
- Deva realm - 6
- Human realm - 1

States of Deprivation:  
- Animal realm - 1
- Hungry ghost realm - 1
- Demon realm - 1
- Hell realm - 1

Slide 11

Mental development → Formless realm
Mental development → Form realm
Ethics, generosity → Deva realm
Ethics → Human realm
Delusion → Animal realm
Greed → Hungry ghost realm
Greed, Delusion → Demon realm
Hatred → Hell realm

Slide 12

- People who want to be born in happiness realms:
  - Must accumulates lots of good karma
- Unfortunately, there is another iron law in dhammachart that makes it more difficult to accumulate good karma

Slide 13

This is:

3 Characteristics of Existence
  - anicca → impermanent
  - dukkha → cannot stay in same state
  - anatta → cannot be controlled or coerced

Slide 14

Law of duality
- When encountering dualistic things our mind becomes unstable all the time resulting in alternating good karma and bad karma. This results in rebirths in different realms all the time.
Slide 15

• How do we prevent the mind from becoming unstable so that we can accumulate good karma every moment?

Slide 16

• The only way is:
  Sati (mindfulness) and Sampajana (clear comprehension)
  at all time in life.

Slide 17

• If you can do it:
  Life in the present will be full of happiness
  Life in the future will be full of happiness
  And suffering will not come back

Slide 18

Good worldly people:
1. Ethics
2. Generosity
3. Glad ↔ Sad
4. Happy ↔ Irritated

Slide 19

Good worldly people:
  Good karma ↔ Bad karma
  ↓
  Cycle of rebirths
  ↓
  Suffering

Slide 20

Good dharma people:
1. Ethics
2. Generosity
3. Mindfulness that understands the present at all times (dhammachart of duality)

Slide 21

Good dharma people:
Not glad = Not sad

Not happy = Not irritated

No cycle of rebirths

No suffering any more

**Slide 22**

Summary tenets of life exist in 3:

1. Ethics = Do not commit any bad actions
2. Generosity = Generate sufficient merits
3. Wisdom to see reality according to dhammachart (purify the mind)

**Slide 23**

*Picture of a large empty heart in grey*

**Slide 24**

3 defilements come to us:

1. Greed
2. Hatred
3. Delusion

**Slide 25**

*Picture of a large heart with 3 compartments filled with 1) Greed (blue), 2) Hatred (red) and 3) Delusion (yellow)*

**Slide 26**

*Picture of heart in solid grey (defiled, tarnished) with caption ‘Present state of mind’*

**Slide 27**

Dharma practice:

4 foundations of mindfulness

every single moment

**Slide 28**

‘Mindfulness’ → *Picture of heart in solid white (pure, untainted)*
Informal lunch the restaurant of Uthai’s daughter in the heart of Bangkok (23 September 2004)

- I did not know Khun Uthai very well at all but some of my relatives were having lunch with him and his wife and I asked to join. The venue was his daughter’s restaurant in the heart of Bangkok.
- His daughter runs a successful restaurant with a friend. She is around 30 years old but looks very young – has dad’s eyes. She seems to have a very good design flair – impressive restaurant – and is very detailed doing a lot of detail work in the restaurant herself. She smartly uses Lotus resources to run the restaurant e.g. personnel and the chain’s kitchen facilities to make her own food.
- I drew this inference from the lunch: the daughter seems to have been given freedom growing up at least in latter stages because she went to art school in England on her will for a year – parents didn’t seem to mind not getting a degree. Seems flexible.
- Uthai was fortune-telling with his computer and had a printer for the women who attended. He seemed to enjoy it very much although in an unemotional, even-tempered way. His voice was always in the same tone and generally same level of volume. He enjoyed talking about all aspects of it. He had the computer ready nearby. I was quite surprised by all this. For me, fortune-telling didn’t seem to match well with Buddhism. There was also a women fortune-teller there as well who was much more loud.
- His wife was smiling and easy talking but not talkative. I felt that his wife was very friendly, nice and easy to get along, convivial and light-hearted. She didn’t look or act old. Probably similar age since they were classmates and friends from university.

Conversation with Pim (Uthai’s wife)

- My wife comments to Pim that they seem very happy as a couple. She replies affirmative because their relationship is not extreme, happy or sad or up and
down since they were friends when they met. Their relationship is as friends (as well as husband and wife I assumed).

- She is most happy at home – doesn’t like to travel since finds it tiring. I found that surprising that she did little travelling (‘taew’ in Thai) – this is unusual for rich Thais. She emphasised home was where she was happiest.
- On my request and while talking she arranged the meeting for me with Uthai by phoning his secretary! He did not even know although I had told her that he had said it would be OK earlier on. This seems to suggest an equal power relation. She took my business card for him and spoke on his behalf. I was impressed. She also mentioned that he did not do much or have much on except for Dhamma speaking engagements. Otherwise he was free. He was in Bangkok or in Sri Racha where they held vipassana retreats.
- Her meditation practice was the light style. He introduced Khun Mae Siri to her. But she likes light easy style of practice. She did not appear to be a rigorous practitioner. Meditation did not appear to have greatly affected their marriage that much (though Uthai has been practicing for a very long time). I wonder whether I should talk to her more?
- She seemed to admire her daughter greatly (indirectly but it was obvious that she was happy with her, though not over the top admiration). Daughter came to say hello to everyone.

Short talk with Uthai
- I asked him about Burmese monk practice of meditation and strictness and stiffness. He said that they teach the hard way first so that you can do the middle way easily later. But I said that they never told us this. He said that that was their way.

Interview on 29th September 2004

Physical settings:
- I met Uthai in central Bangkok where he had an office on a high floor.
- The whole floor appeared rather cramped, low ceiling and it appeared as if few people worked on this floor.
- Two young women were outside, fairly attractive, one is Uthai’s secretary (although he said that he has retired since policy of company is 55 retirement age – at his daughter’s restaurant previously). I was surprised he still had office and full staff.
- His secretary called him ‘Tan’ meaning ‘Sir’ which was usual for someone of his status in Thailand though I was not used to the formal nature and high respect typical of Thai society. Probably I had been away in Australia too long.
- As I entered his office a fairly imposing man was setting up a laptop on K Uthai’s desk – I assume he was an IT assistant or personal assistant. I was somewhat surprised to see this …. or was it the sight of a fairly tall man with very respectable presence and demeanour – it could have been Uthai himself.
- The office is small by any executive standard: very ordinary with a desk, bookshelves to one side. Windows behind chair. Small sofa and table for waiting guests. Air conditioning low but noticeable hum in background.

Impression of Uthai’s Character:
• He was fairly tall and moderate to large frame (especially by Thai standard) –
looks respectable and somewhat imposing (has weight and credibility).
• Discreet personality
• Dress in shirt and tie. Respectably plain but did not stand out
• Low bass tone voice
• Energetic in speaking about dharma

The Interview Session:
• Uthai enters on time, after I had waited 5 minutes.
• He had an unruffled demeanour when he came in. This seem to the case all
the time that I had seen him including during his presentations at Khun Mae
Siri retreats where he fielded many questions utterly professionally and
convincingly. I had seen him 5-6 times at these presentations.
• Talks about seeing Roger Federer at Thailand Open last night, how Federer
glides across the court without making any sound – excellent agility. Khun
Uthai is a keen tennis player – plays few times every week with doubles
friends
• Gets to the point quickly and asks about my agenda today
• He does not seem emotional. His monotone voice although shows
enthusiasm and is by no mean boring.
• Some animation like when he grasped my forearm tightly to demonstrate
mental focus and then loosely to illustrate relaxation.
• Used Powerpoint to illustrate his ideas – used them well. Seemed to enjoy
using this tool.
• At one point I really emphathised with him on the issue of having a voice
criticising Buddha. So I followed my interest to ask him for the solution to his
(and my somewhat similar problem). This is in some part a conversation of
like-minded people sharing a journey. Obviously dharma has been his
passion for a long time. Whether it will be mine as well only time will tell.
However, it seems to dominate my thinking for the time being.
Interview

Part 1 (6 April 2005)

Interviewer: What lead you to take up Buddhism?

Quinn: This was so long time ago now. I think after I graduated from uni I got very interested in existentialism: what is life all about. And I became very conscious that I was a loner, an outsider, compared to the group mentality and stuff like that. And after my first job I became again quite disillusioned with what I was doing. I found that my training hadn’t really satisfied what I was interested in. I didn’t know what I was interested in. So I went overseas to England on a sort of trip to find out what it was ... I had this big realisation that if you didn’t find what you’re really interested in life, and organise your work around that, then your life was going to be a pretty unfulfilling life. We spend one third of our lives working and if you’re not clear where you want to work and so on ... So I literally went overseas on a trip of exploration of where do I want to go with my life. I started reading books ... I went back to all the things that I’d been interested in when I was a kid, you know, history and all sorts of irrelevant stuff but I finally became very interested in the psychology of human consciousness. I started reading Freud and some of the seminal books that were coming out in the seventies and early eighties on the psychology of consciousness. Western psychology was beginning to take meditation and Eastern philosophy seriously. One of the key books I read was by Ornstein. I just read and like what happens when you go through a period of deep personal reflection, every time I went into a bookshop or library, books seem to just jump of the shelf to me, the exact one I wanted to read. I first I played around with books on the Occult and then it got into the psychology of consciousness, altered states, meditation and then into Eastern philosophy. Then I began to seriously study Daoism and Buddhism. And then I enrolled in a school in Bristol called the Ching Academy where a teacher taught Ch’an Buddhism, plus Tai Chi and stuff like that. He was a Chinese doctor trained in Western medicine as well as traditional Chinese medicine.

Interviewer: How old were you then?

Quinn: I think I was about 26 or 27.

Interviewer: And were you brought up a Christian?

Quinn: Yep, brought up as a Roman Catholic. But I mean – I don’t know whether this is relevant to you question – but one thing that I’ve discovered as a practicing Buddhist now in the Western Buddhist Order: we went on a retreat where we explored how at a deep level we are all living out certain myth and have been living that for a long time. So I was able to reflect there that I had been interested
in spiritual matters since I was a child. You know, I can remember certain spontaneous mystical experiences when I was a child. The early Catholic experiences I had ... we used to live opposite a farm and we would go and ... my mother as a devout Irish Catholic would take my brother and I to mass on the 9 first Fridays and the 6 first Saturdays because if you do that and have Holy Communion you don’t go to hell. But we used to walk across these fields at the crack of dawn and go into this chapel with Catholic monks chanting ... hymns and things like that. And as a child and Catholicism you know quite often in the mass I would have what I’d called now spiritual experiences. So there has been an undercurrent of spirituality that has been there since I was a child. And when I studied Buddhism under Master Ching, it just made so much sense - I couldn’t believe how clear it was. Like a lot of Westerners, I was very impressed with the notion of not having to believe in anything. You know you try it out in the Buddhist tradition and if it works, it works. There’s no blind belief in dogma. That whole experience with that teacher was mind-blowing for me. I felt for the first time in my life, I just got very clear answers to many of my questions, you know, as an existentialist I would have called myself in those days. That is where it started.

Interviewer: Did you say Master Ching?

Quinn: Ching Yang.

Interviewer: What is the history of the Ch'an tradition?

Quinn: When we said earlier that when Indian Buddhism encountered a civilisation as advanced as China, it adapted to the Chinese culture and one of the philosophical systems that was already there was Daoism. And indeed the early Buddhists used to use Daoist terminology to teach Buddhism. They would call instead of some an arahant or something like that they would call him the man of the Dao. And so Ch'an Buddhism which is the forerunner of Zen Buddhism in Japan is considered to be a complete mixing of Daoism and Buddhism. And they trace themselves back to one of the Buddha’s disciple, the one who became enlightened when the Buddha held up a flower ... his name was Kasapa, I think his name was. So the Ch'an tradition is very typical of the Chinese in the sense that the Chinese are very practical people: they want to know if something works or not, like combat, so they try it out. So the Ch'an Buddhist tradition was ... they’re famous sayings such as ‘No dependence on scriptures,’ ‘Direct seeing into the mind’ and ‘Experiencing one’s Buddha-nature.’ So Ch'an stresses meditation and not book learning. So they’re very, very direct. It’s one of the hardest ... it’s considered in China, I’ve spoken to Chinese monks, one of the most difficult form of Buddhism to practice.

Interviewer: Did you meditate and study dharma?

Quinn: I started to meditate and practice mindfulness. I started reading lots of books on Buddhism and Daoism. I was training at the same time in Tai Chi and a couple of other Chinese martial arts and a bit of traditional Chinese medicine. So I went to him for about 4 years. He used to give talks and I used to take quite
comprehensive notes and the materials he communicated was just fascinating and very, very direct. I would say he was the most intelligent man I had ever met in my life. And incredibly articulate even though he was Chinese – he spoke perfect English. He was Chinese aristocracy and he was married to an English aristocrat. He would say things like, “The reason your mind is full of thoughts is because you don’t think one thought through.” You think a thought, and then you think a thought about it, and so you never complete the thought and that’s why your mind is full of thoughts. If you thought the thought, the thought would be thought and your mind would be empty. A lot of the Ch’an stuff is about form and formlessness, you know. Find the space between two thoughts – that’s also your mind. And a very direct approach that tries to use statements that contradict the intellect, so you have to go directly into the meditative state to see and experience. That approach, I’ve subsequently learnt, is not all that necessarily suitable for Western people. That’s one of the major differences between Ch’an Buddhism or Asian Buddhism and Western Buddhism. The Chinese students just believe totally in their Master. Whatever the Master tells them to do they do it. That doesn’t work for Western people. Western people have got questions and they want answers to their questions. We’re intellectuals – we like to read books and study. So one of first form of Buddhism that came into the West was Zen and now we would say – Western Buddhist groups like ours would say – it’s very hard and very demanding. You know in Japan they have high rates of alcoholism and everything, and Zen Buddhism, it’s one of the most difficult. I mean a Chinese monk said to me he used to practice Chen Tai which is the other major Chinese form. Chi Yi was the founder of Chen Tai and he integrated all the teachings into a comprehensive system. This monk said to me he was brought up in the Chen Tai system, but he said the quickest way to get enlightened if you’re really determined to is Ch’an Buddhism but it is very, very, very hard. Someone who is doing that is really committed 110%.

Interviewer: Are you still committed to that tradition?

Quinn: No. After 4 years with Master Ching, I became disillusioned with him. I don’t want to deride him especially that he’s dead now – he had a horrible accident. But like a lot of highly intelligent people he was a bit arrogant – he lacked the compassion side. And about that time I got involved with the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO). I found their approach and the teachings of their leader, Sangharakshita, very, very useful. So I stayed with them.

Interviewer: Is he still the leader?

Quinn: He’s stepped down and been ill quite lately but he’s stepped down and handed over the leadership to what’s been called the College of Prefectors – about 13 male and female order members who are now running the show. Some people would say that that is fairly unique. You know, when a man, a teacher, who is actually has generated one of the biggest movement in the West actually steps down and hands it over to someone else so he doesn’t keep himself up there as a guru, you know. A lot of them, do but when they die the movement collapses. So what he’s done is handed it over to his followers before he dies.
Interviewer: So you found something in FWBO that was more suited to you?

Quinn: No, I still found stuff I’d done with Master Ching complementary and in some ways ... you can’t say better ... for example, in the Ch’an tradition, there is a tremendous emphasis on continuous mindfulness, whereas in the FWBO they are more into study and meditation, and sometime they will not keep up their mindfulness. So I find that both have helped me a lot.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about the practices in the FWBO. What does it involve for you?

Quinn: I’ll give you an example of what I learnt from them that was quite useful. Again under Master Ching and especially in relation to martial arts training there was this emphasis on practicing continuous mindfulness, and I used to try and do that: when I was teaching, when I was walking across the premises and so on, I used to try to keep mindful all the time. But once I got involved with the FWBO I discovered that the type of mindfulness I was practicing they would call ‘alienated’ awareness versus ‘integrated’ awareness. And this is where I think Sangharakshita will go down in history as a pioneer in the West because a lot of his teachings deal with Western psychology and Western conditioning and how that can trip us up and how we have to come to term with that, in a way, before we can grow spiritually. And like, what his teaching revealed to me was that people can practice mindfulness without really experiencing themselves. You know, it’s like they’re watching themselves. And he distinguishes what he calls ‘alienated awareness’ and ‘integrated awareness.’ So alienated awareness is when you’re, let’s say, observing yourself and watching yourself, but you’re not experiencing yourself. You know, it’s like they’re watching themselves. And he distinguishes what he calls ‘alienated awareness’ and ‘integrated awareness.’ So alienated awareness is when you’re, let’s say, observing yourself and watching yourself, but you’re not experiencing yourself. And his teaching even went even further and said that most Western people are in that state all the time: we’re alienated form our emotions.

Interviewer: I see.

Quinn: So if you are learning meditation practices from an Eastern teacher who doesn’t understand the Western psyche. There was another one in England who did the same and his students ended in an insane asylum because he was teaching vipassana incorrectly. These people were spending enormous periods of time watching themselves and they must have been in a state of highly alienated awareness and they went loopy somewhere. And it was because the teacher didn’t understand how Western people go at things; we’re very wilful, we’re very forceful; we tend to want to achieve results straight away and we tend to, by and large, which is part of our Western conditioning, to be emotionally underdeveloped and emotionally alienated. So the teaching I remember that put it the best was: integrated awareness is when you’re not only watching yourself but also experiencing yourself. So it’s like ... Sangharakshita uses the word ‘mind-ful’. It is like if you are filling the object you are observing with your mind, that’s integrated awareness. If you’re standing back watching yourself as of outside of yourself, that’s not proper mindfulness. Now the first teacher didn’t
teach like that and I think, in those days, I used to be going around all the time practicing mindfulness and I was practicing it the wrong way!

Interviewer: Tell me, for you, give me an example what that means to you when you are mind-fu'. How would you be feeling, experiencing, doing things?

Quinn: One of the foundation practices we do in the FWBO the Four Foundations Of Mindfulness (awareness of body and its posture, awareness of sensations of body and whether they’re pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, awareness of emotions, awareness of thoughts, those sorts of things). And I think after a while, it is not that difficult to become mindful in the conscious mind of that most of the time. Most of the time I am quite mindful where my body is, how I’m feeling, what I’m thinking, and so on. But on other occasions I will attempt to practice a more formal form of mindfulness ... doing activities like the washing up fully present, training in the Tai Chi form fully present.

Interviewer: Let’s say an emotion, how would the integrated form of mindful and the alienated form differ on emotions that arise?

Quinn: I think that is a very good one you’ve chosen. If we asked Western people to experience themselves emotionally in that stage, the first thing that they tend to do is analyse themselves. What emotions am I feeling? Anger, joy ... they start labelling and what you’ve got to teach them is don’t analyse yourself. Just literally, concretely experience your emotional state at this moment! We have a saying in the FWBO that if you’ve been practicing mindfulness like that properly for a while, someone ought to be able to say to you ‘How are you feeling?’ and you can instantly tell them. Whereas if you ask most Western people that, ‘How are you feeling right at this moment?’ they’d say, ‘I wouldn’t have a clue.’ And then they might start thinking ‘Oh, what am I feeling? I am feeling happy or unhappy,’ but they are not experiencing. We even borrow Tibetan techniques to really experience – this is very phenomenological – to really experience your emotions directly and concretely, and not thinking about them, and analysing them, labelling them because labels are very limited any way. Tibetan uses a technique which ask you to explore ‘What colour is it?’ ‘What sound is it making?’ ‘What is it?’ To use sensory imagery to get more and more in contact with your emotions. Do you understand what I’m saying? ‘Is it a warm feeling or a cold feeling?’ ‘What texture is it? Is it hard or is it sticky?’ And you know even to go to the point of where you can experience it as just energy and like one of Sangarashita’s publication pamphlet he talks about experiencing emotions as direct energy and they unhooking your personality from it, and once you get to that stage then you can transform that energy into anything you want. So, for example, I’ve done this once when I was very depressed after breaking off with a girlfriend. I was feeling very unhappy so I just allowed myself to experience that until I got to the point where it was raw energy. Then I turned that energy using imagery and so on, into metta (loving-kindness) for myself. And it worked! I went from being quite depressed – very depressed actually – to 45 minutes later feeling loving-kindness and compassion for myself. So that’s the sort of thing I’m taking about. I think Western people tend to relate to themselves intellectually.
So that means all the time analysing yourself, labelling, classifying and, in a way, avoiding experiencing the emotion.

Interviewer: You’re saying that that isn’t mindfulness at all?

Quinn: It can be a way to mindfulness. I mean it is now a very common technique in the West to play to that tendency in the Western mind by saying, ‘Ok, initially you can label but after you’ve labelled it just put that aside and just concretely experience yourself as you are now. Doesn’t matter whether you’re happy or unhappy because Western people don’t want to be unhappy and so they don’t want to experience that. It’s very new for a lot of people. You can see it ... and for me it was very important. The issue is not whether ... it’s not important whether you’re happy or unhappy. It’s just to directly experience that emotion and work with it. Correct me if I’m wrong but I feel that many people in Asia are much more in touch with their emotions. My wife, for example, is Chinese. I mean her friend came around once and asked her for some advice about something ... because ‘I want to change’ ... and my wife said what you’ve got to do is put your heart into it. And afterward this friend came to me and said, ‘Yes, but how do you put your heart into it?’ And for my wife it’s not an issue. If she wants to put her heart into something then she does it! But in the West we don’t now how to do that. So these are the very interesting areas in the Western psyche that certainly Master Ching didn’t really explore and I thing Sangharakshita’s teaching will go down in history of Buddhism in the West as addressing this issue of ... he’s got loads of saying but one of the most common one is that Western people tend to be overdeveloped intellectually and underdeveloped emotionally, and therefore much of our spirituality growth or quest is about finding the emotional equivalent of our intellectual understanding. And he really hit the nail on the head there.

Interviewer: So a balance.

Quinn: Well myself as an academic, an intellectual, I know Buddhism from A to Z and back again but that doesn’t necessarily change you. It’s not until you get your emotional energy engaged ... behind where you want to go intellectually that you change. So his teaching in many way focuses on that issue in Western people. So what we do continuously is try and find ways of engaging ourselves emotionally, not just doing it intellectually. So whereas with Master Ching that kind of ... his teachings were intellectually fascinating and made a lot of intellectual connections for me. But now 20 years later I’m still struggling just to put it into practice.

Interviewer: The mindfulness you did with Master Ching – was that the kind of alienated mindfulness you talked about looking back now?

Quinn: When I look back on it, definitely. I used to be holding myself so intensely in a state of ... you know, um ... and the danger of that is that it backfires. When it backfires it really backfires. When I look back on it, it was a very forceful, wilful form of mindfulness. Not a gentle one that infuses you with whatever you’re doing with your mind.
Interviewer: I think that this is common now in the East as well as more people are like the West because of the Western education and culture.

Quinn: What a shame. When the diet ... I taught a course at UTC on the state of sustainable futures in Asia and the future is dreadful because of the slavish way ... the whole of Asia seems to be following the Western development model. Even the diet ... you know Australia’s export of beef to Japan ... a Japanese author pointing out that the wheat-meat diet of the West has caused more environmental damage than the traditional fish-rice diet of say Japan and Thailand and so on ... you know how it creates ecosystems that are much more working with nature than ... we’re now exporting the wheat-meat diet to those countries. In Japan they even have to make the kids eat a certain amount of rice now. That impact on Asian culture worries me dreadfully. To move out of traditional sustainable agriculture into growing corn for export for the cattle in the West ... the Western model is driving the countries out of Western sustainable agriculture. And yet the more environment sensitive people are going back to the traditional Asian one.

Interviewer: So you’ve been practicing for 20 odd years now? Is this correct?

Quinn: Yes but I wouldn’t say ... it’s been up and down. I wouldn't call myself necessarily a very good Buddhist.

Interviewer: I think everyone struggles until you become ...

Quinn: ... enlightened.

Interviewer: Exactly.

Quinn: Master Ching, he was very clever. He had a saying, ‘All people are neurotic, more or less. Some people more, some people less.’ And the Buddha said that all worldlings are insane.

Interviewer: Unless you’re born in the Tibetan tradition and you were born to become the Dalai Lama, I think most people struggle.

Quinn: And you go through phases. I tell people I’ve been meditating on and off for 20 years.

Interviewer: That 20 years, what is the impact of your life?

Quinn: I find that a very difficult question to answer about myself. I’d really have to reflect on that. In a way you have to rely on your friends, I think. And my friends, for example here and over the last 5 years, would say that I’ve changed ... tremendously. One friend said, “You’ve changed even during the time I’ve known you which is about a year. I think ... I’m just thinking of the top of my head ... I think that what Buddhism has possibly helped me with the most is my Irish
Catholic conditioning. I was brought up in the Irish Catholic tradition and we were basically taught that we were flawed from the moment of birth, and the whole Catholic education which was very strict ... you were taught about hell, you were just made to feel that there was something wrong with you. You see this is again a component of Western conditioning which the Asian traditions don’t have the same.

Interviewer: I’ve heard that.

Quinn: They don’t understand. Because we’re brought up as Christians and even if you’re not brought up as a practicing Christian, as I have to say time and again to people, whether you like it or not if you’re brought up in the Western culture even if you’re not a practicing Christian you’ve been influence by Christianity. It’s one of the main cultural forces. The biggest problem is this notion of being born with sin on your soul, and you know, Jesus Christ having to die on the cross to save you! If you’re ... from the word go you’re taught that there’s something wrong with you ... whereas in the Buddhist tradition you’re taught that it is wonderful to be born human.

Interviewer: Yes, this is true.

Quinn: I mean I was in a tutorial at SL university. I was teaching Asian belief systems from a hermeneutical point of view where the whole aim was to throw your own Western taken-for-granted beliefs and values and attitudes into sharper relief by exploring and standing in the shoe of complete different cultural values. So I was teaching Buddhism and Daoism and Australian Aboriginal mythology and the idea was that the kids would study that stuff to throw their own Western values into clearer relief. It’s a phenomenological technique. So we would ask the students to present papers at the tutorials and one little Australian Chinese girl came to me and said she wanted to give her paper on Jesus Christ – she was a born-again Christian. The whole point of the course was that you’re be better off doing something on Buddhism or Daoism to look at different value systems to yours. So I encouraged her to do that. But on the day she came to give her paper in the tutorial and the first thing she said was, “Jesus Christ died on the cross to save us,” and all the kids immediately looked at the floor. And then a Malaysian Chinese girl, about the same age, just interrupted her straight away and said in that sort of guttural Malaysian style, “Why someone have to die on the cross to save you? Why you can’t save yourself?” [in strong Chinese accent]. And I was going “Oh ...” [in a tone of satisfaction]. That was fantastic.

Interviewer: But for you it seemed that it was a heavy burden.

Quinn: It still is! It still is!

Interviewer: It’s like you’re carrying the cross.

Quinn: You carry a lot of ... again, Sangharakshita he identified it as ‘irrational guilt’. I’m generalising here but most Western people – and I teach Western
people about Buddhism – all agree that Western people lack self-confidence, lack self-esteem and have a predisposition of sort of self-hatred. Of course, how you feel inside yourself, you project outwardly. And that is partly why Western society is so aggressive and so lacking in compassion because people are feeling angry inside because they’ve been brought up ...

Interviewer: And you felt that?

Quinn: Yes. I can elaborate with 2 examples, maybe 3 – can you remind me of that? The first one is: Sangharakshita actually recommended that people engaged in what he called ‘therapeutic blasphemy’ because the belief in God, the Creator God, can be so powerful in you that you’re totally irrational in your attitude. Is it Ok if I swear? This is strictly confidential?

Interviewer: Yes. Go ahead.

Quinn: So this fascinated me. Could I actually say, “Get stuff God!” or whatever. And one day I made myself say, “F*** the Virgin Mary!” and before I could say it I thought this, “Oh my god this ... hrrr [frightened tone]” - may be the sky would fall down on me or something like that. But I made myself do it and that showed me. Even at that age - I would have been about 30 by then - that that level of irrationality can still be in you. Even though you’ve intellectually rejected Christianity and all of that, you’ve been conditioned since childhood in those beliefs and to actually swear at the Virgin Mary, you know, that would be considered a terrible crime by Christians. And this teaching by Sangharakshita is considered by some, even Western Buddhists, quite controversial. You know going around saying “F*** the Virgin Mary!” But I think it was fantastic! The sense of relief that I felt when I could say that, “Yep” [clapped hands showing satisfaction]. The second thing. When I started practicing metta-bhavana – you know the first stage where you feel loving-kindness for yourself ... well traditionally, it is known that Western people struggle with that step.

Interviewer: Yes, I’ve heard. Did you?

Quinn: No, I very quickly started to feel the warmth. But what it did reveal to me was the amount of subconscious gossip that was saying the opposite.

Interviewer: Saying the opposite?

Quinn: Yes, things like ... to even say things to yourself like, “I love you,” or just to say your own name with affection silently, that was difficult. Part of you is saying, “You’re not suppose to do this. You’re not supposed to do that.” Or to say, “I can achieve anything I want to. I have enormous potential,” and then you would have another voice saying, “No, you haven’t. You’re a failure.”

Interviewer: Wow.
Quinn: And I often teach to Western people when they do that first stage when they practice they will often encounter how much of their sub-vocal gossip. Their subconscious non-verbal whatever it is ... thinking, is very negative and very anti-themselves. And you know you look in the mirror and go, “Yuck!” - how ugly you are. You don’t go to the mirror and say, “May you be happy.” A lot of Western people struggle with that first stage. In the case of the English, they have a problem with even feeling strong feelings. So Sangharakshita encouraged them to read poetry, get involve in the fine arts, etc., to get yourself involved emotionally. The Celtic people like the Scots and Irish and Welsh don’t have trouble with strong feelings but like me they’re often wedded to very negative self-views and things like that.

Interviewer: You’re Australian but Irish origins?

Quinn: Very Irish. Yes, uncle priests, all the priests in Church and the brothers were Irish decent. I personally think that Catholicism is one of the worse religion that was inflicted on the Irish, and I think that it’s why the Irish can be so emotional and full of contradictions and all of that. They’re a very emotional people and yet Catholicism is one of the most repressive religions! So that why the Irish have ... there’s an old saying ‘An Irishman doesn’t know what he believes in but he’ll fight for it.’ There’s all this evidence now that that was recent in Irish history that this very repressive form of Catholicism came in and like when the Scots do their dance and wave their hands up in the air, the Irish through Catholicism was taught to keep them strictly by their sides because that was too sensuous or something.

Interviewer: What was the third point?

Quinn: I’ve forgotten it now. Again Sangharakshita and the FWBO, we stress 2 fundamental meditation practices for Western people. In fact, we say in our centres that our initial aim is to just help people become more healthy, sane, happy human beings. That’s our simple initial aim. And whenever you say that to a Western audience ... you know I’d say, “That’s what we want to help. Do you think that’s a good aim?” and they all go, “Oh, yes.” Happy, healthy, sane individuals. So Sangharakshita’s approach is before you can grow spiritually, you’ve got to grow psychologically. You’ve got to make yourself a happy, sane, integrated self before you can go beyond the self. And so of the evidence is that the early forms of Buddhism that came into the West like Zen, if you like, forced into situations where they had experiences but they were not integrated enough psychologically to assimilate. So Sangharakshita’s approach ... like Zen’s approach is to shatter the ego ... our approach is, no, to build a very healthy, mature and integrated self – a true individual which dovetails into existentialism and phenomenology. Because how can you go beyond the self if you’re not a happy, sane self. So the 2 practices we stress are: mindfulness of breathing and metta-bhavana. Mindfulness of breathing is to develop calmness, tranquillity and mental clarity. Metta-bhavana is to basically help develop positive emotions. It’s those quality that we feel Western people need most of all. Forget enlightenment and transcendental experiences, we just need this stuff initially.
Interviewer: Like walking before you can run.

Quinn: Every class I've run over the years I've never seen any Western people not all nod their heads when you say, “We feel these are qualities Western people need: tranquillity, calmness, mental clarity and positive emotions. Wouldn’t you agree?” They all nod.

Interview: Do you practice both of these techniques?

Quinn: Yes.

Interviewer: You were saying a while ago that your practice was assisting you somehow in overthrowing that legacy?

Quinn: Yes, I would say that’s ... that’s been one of the major impact of Buddhism on me: it’s undermine a lot of that negative, irrational self-view. But I have to say that to this day it’s still there. But now I have tools and techniques that I can ... I just don’t take it seriously any more.

Interviewer: How do you do that?

Quinn: Well if it arises, then you just perceive it as a mental hindrance or something like that. Usually self-hatred ... you know the five hindrances ... usually ill-will toward yourself, and you just use an antidote to it or just don’t take it seriously – let go of it.

Interviewer: So it pops up once in a while?

Quinn: Well, for example, if I’ve been unskilful or broken one of the precepts or something like that, then your Catholic upbringing can really make you dwell in self-hatred and stuff like that. Now you let go of it and get back to the practices because you can rather than wallow in self-hatred.

Interviewer: I’m interested because this kind of experience I haven’t heard much of it in Asian people?

Quinn: Well another thing we say quite often is that when Western Buddhists especially the Tibetan and the Thais encounters Western people they find almost universally that we lack self-confidence and self-esteem. Whereas the Tibetans don’t even know what the word ‘grow self-esteem’ means! You know? They’re just brought up from childhood. So it’s a real issue in the West and it has many subtle ramifications, to do with crime, aggressiveness in society, the coarseness of it, the selfishness, materialism, it’s all related to this.

Interviewer: I guess it can trigger other nasty stuff in us, if you have self-hatred.
Quinn: Also we say what you’re feeling about yourself you inevitably project outwardly. So if you are in love with yourself, you’re going to be very good with people. If you don’t like yourself, you’re going to be not very good with people. Another writer, Eric Fromm’s, he wrote a book called ‘Art of Loving’ and in that he says that Western people have a problem with self-love. Causes of it in his opinion: Freud’s narcissism and Protestantism. I used to say to English students a bit about metta for yourself and for a friend and I remember one lass in particular saying, “Oh no I don’t know whether you should feel love for yourself.” I said what about for a friend. “Oh yes, that’s OK.” “Well can’t you treat yourself as a friend?” “Ah, you’re not supposed to do that. You’re supposed to be critical of yourself.” You see, that’s Christianity, or versions of it. Maybe the New Age movement is going more toward Buddhist forms of Christianity but this area of confusion. Again complements to Sangharakshita, he says things like you must feel feelings of metta toward yourself and they mustn’t be luke warm or tepid. They must be actually quite hot, even spicy. This completely confronts the Western consciousness because you think, “It’s really OK to really feel passionately loving about myself? You know I’m still struggling with that. I can feel it as I am talking now. There’s a deep part of my psyche that says, “No, you’re not suppose to be that much in love with yourself,” or something like that. Again this is irrational. It’s a difficult awkward area. People are confused about that. If I’m loving myself, I’m doing something wrong or Christians would often say, “No, that is self-centred, that’s selfishness. You should be loving others.” And then you say, “Jesus said love others as you love yourself.” The Buddha said, “Love yourself and then love others like you love yourself.” He said it the right way round. Unfortunately, Jesus Christ didn’t say it the right way round. So Christians would say, “No, you’re not suppose to love yourself. You’re supposed to love others.” And one of the charges against Buddhism in the West by Christians is that it is self-centred. They’ll use that one to criticise.

Interviewer: OK

Quinn: I just remembered the third thing which was this new notion of psychological bypassing that’s coming out in the literature. Before we get on to that the final thing I want to say about myself is, and it’s come mainly from going on retreats. When I go on retreats, after a couple of days, I just get happier and happier and happier ... usually. And I’ve been on retreats regularly every year, a couple of times a year.

Interviewer: Like 7 days, 10 days, more?

Quinn: 2 weeks is the longest. And I was doing that even when I was in the UK. I’d make myself go on a retreat at one of the FWBO retreat centres once a year. Even if I wasn’t going to one of their centres – I stopped going to one of their centres after a while – I’d still go religiously on a retreat each year. With hindsight, I can say to myself very objectively and factually that when I am in those sorts of situations I experience a side of myself that is just incredibly happy. And usually after a couple of days, people just say to me you’re beaming. You’re beaming, you know! First solitary I did this happiness came out and was
there. And that’s given me a confidence now that actually underneath the Catholic conditioning there’s a very happy, and there always was, boy. You know the one that was having those spontaneous spiritual experiences. And I now know that, in a way, that’s the ground of my being. And even if I’m feeling depressed or negative, I trust that underneath that, if I let it come out, if I do metta or something like that, the loving-kindness will come out.

Interviewer: So it is like you are in touch with the happiness that existed already, that maybe you’ve rediscovered it.

Quinn: Yes, yes ... I’d say rediscovered the fact that I’ve always been basically a happy person. But the Catholic upbringing was terrible. It just confused you and covered up so much. The retreats and the metta-bhavana has enabled me to rediscover that or, in fact, discover it for the first time because when you’re a kid you don’t understand that sort of thing.

Interviewer: You said ‘happy’. What does that mean? What is your experience of happiness?

Quinn: Again, I think initially I discovered this theoretically. We teach this in meditation courses that happiness from a Buddhist point of view is more to do with an absence of inner conflicts, an absence of guilt, feeling of contentment, of tranquillity, you know, being at ease with oneself. Again, speaking as a Westerner, that is hard thing for a lot of Western people to their head around. You know, I’ve had a pretty hedonistic lifestyle: I’ve had loads of girlfriends, drinking, you name it. You know I was a pleasure-seeking being and what happiness was: the more pleasure you got the happier you were. And to discover that there’s something else which is actually just very serene, very stable, not incredibly powerful like sensuous experiences can be. I mean the Buddha has a beautiful quote where he talked about a sense of unmixed ease. So to me I’ve discovered that, that it’s actually ... feeling at ease with yourself, feeling integrated, and, from a Catholic point of view, feeling not guilty, feeling an absence of inner conflict – that’s happiness.

Interviewer: Is that what you felt in the retreats?
Quinn: ... and outside the retreats.

Interviewer: But is it more intense in the retreats?

Quinn: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: So absence of conflict?

Quinn: Because again Christian conditioning ...

Interview: You don’t have to be analytical. I’m just asking you what the experience was.

Quinn: What I was going to say was: the Catholic upbringing can give you a predisposition to a lot of inner conflict because you’re always analysing yourself, being right or wrong or being naughty.

Interviewer: You said you were happy and you really exuded it. Saying it you reflected back on it. I just want to know how it felt ... whatever words you can use to describe it?

Quinn: [Laughs] Very joyful almost, I would even go as far as to say, almost ecstatic. And you know even you’re aware that it could carry you away, and you’ve got to be careful about that on retreats. That’s one reason why we practice silence and so on because if the energy level builds up and when people start speaking again, they can easily get into arguments and stuff like that I’ve noticed on retreats. Yes, a very strong experience of joy, even feelings of ecstasy, bliss which again I can remember as a child.

Interviewer: I see. So something different from the usual sensual pleasure that we were used to.

Quinn: Sensual pleasure seems to be coarse in comparison. It is a more refined state of being. But again it’s a real struggle to Western people to seriously acknowledge that you can be in that state and be happier all the time, rather than pursue pleasure. I still pursue pleasure but it’s like when you’re on retreat you’ve got no choice. You know all of that is taken away.

Interviewer: In all your practices of over 20 years, have there been any defining moments that have made the greatest impact in your life?

Quinn: Could you ask that one in a minute because I just want to explore that notion of inner conflict a bit more because I think it is very rampant in the West? I mean it’s one thing we’ve discovered in the group that people are very prone to guilt ... even when they start practicing Buddhism. They come up against guilt. They might, like one chap decided to leave his wife for quite rational reasons but he couldn’t get away from feelings of guilt for having done it. And that’s irrational. Like if you’ve rationally decided and you both agree ... that’s it you should just be
able to let go of it. But this guilt keeps coming up. A lot of people have reported that but my wife as Chinese put it to me beautifully once because I told her I was feeling down on myself and that I was a failure. This is the thing that can come out all the time that you’re a failure which has got to do with that Christian or Catholic upbringing. It’s very easy to define yourself as a failure in your own eyes because you’re brought up in this very strict code of commandments and all of that. In a way we now believe that psychologically in the West that Christians have more tendency of blasphemy because rather than being involved in moral or ethical principles because they’ve chosen to do it themselves, because they see it as working on their own minds, Christians are told to believe in these commandments that God brought down on you. And if you don’t believe in them or practice them, you go to hell! So Sangharakshita again wrote a paper that there is a greater tradition of blasphemy in the Christian tradition than there is, say in, the Buddhist tradition because we’re being forced to go against ourselves. You’re being forced to do things instead of voluntarily and the psychological ramifications are very deep and very profound. If you’ve decided to take responsibility for your own life in a kind and compassionate way as oppose to practicing these things or else you go to hell. You know as a Catholic kid we were taught even in teenage if you masturbated and you died the next day, you go to hell! It is a mortal sin! Can you imagine all the fear that creates in you? You know once upon a time, my brother and I were showering after going to the beach. My uncle was a priest and he used to take us to the beach and then we’d go back to my auntie’s place. And we were showering and we were in there having a really good time, and he came in and started screaming at us: “You’re engaging in body worship!” And I remembered as a kid, for one week I was worried about that. You know, “What’s wrong with me?” – I didn’t realise what I was doing was wrong and I was really ... because I was a sincere Catholic. I spent a week thinking what had I done wrong! I didn’t realise that that was wrong. And all we were, were kids having a warm shower, really enjoying it after we had been on the beach. So this lends this predisposition on you to sit in judgement on yourself and see yourself as a failure. Now the thing my wife said to me once was: “The reason you think you’re a failure is because you think you’re great” [laugh]. And it took me 15 years just to work that out. But it is dead right. Again, you’re asking yourself what’s this got to do with Buddhism in relation to the West? It’s fixed self view. It’s fixed self view. The reason you think you’re a failure is because you’ve got this unrealistic model of what you think is the proper you. And that causes inner conflict.

Interviewer: And that proper you is from the Catholic tradition in your case?

Quinn: In my case, yes. But in all Christian traditions maybe in the Irish Catholic case more virulently than the others although the Protestant are pretty bad too. Protestants are very repressive. But that’s been another breakthrough. Again another of Sangharakshita’s teachings: if you do something unskillful, the Buddhist tradition which actually came from Chi Yi, founder of Chien Tai School, as part of his advice that you shouldn’t wallow in the guilt. You should get out of that as soon as you can. You accept what you did will have consequences but as soon as you can you get out of that. Use devotional practices or whatever to get
you back to the path. Because the longer you stay in it the longer you're not doing what a Buddhist should do. But what was pointed out, and this was a breakthrough for me, was: What is the difference between wallowing in self-hatred and self-conceit? There's no difference. Someone who thinks they're the greatest thing on the face of the earth is what we call egotistical. But someone who thinks they're an absolute failure ... what is the difference? They're both conceited views.

Interviewer: Opposite sides of the coin. Same coin.

Quinn: That's what my wife was basically saying: “The reason you think you're a failure is because you think you're great.” It's like you're setting yourself up for failure. And when you fail you condemn yourself. And all your Christian conditions says, “See! You've got mortal sins on your soul; you're basically flawed.” So I think in many Western people there is a sense of inner conflict and ill at ease all the time. You know I can think of another ... Sufi poem that we use which is: ‘Come, come, no matter how many times you're broken the precepts; Come, come, this is not a path of despair.’ Whereas to this day if I break the precept I start to feel feelings of ‘You’re a failure’ and it's very hard to get rid of that. So that falls into the area, I would say, that's problematic in Western conditionings which is fixed self-view. Western people think that you're fixed. It's part of our materialistic way of thinking. We're just these entities made up of all these building blocks and we're fixed and we can never change. An old dog can't change its spots. To actually progress in the Buddhist teachings to the point where you get a very flexible view of yourself is very hard work for Western people.

Interviewer: Because of this concept of being fixed?

Quinn: Yes. That's the first fetter to overcome in Theravada Buddhism: fixed self-view: I am what I am what I am.

Interviewer: Did you have that feeling of being fixed?

Quinn: Yes. I still struggle with it.

Interviewer: ... and you can't progress ...

Quinn: I don’t pay it any attention but still crops up. It's very deep. If you've been conditioned from infancy, it's so facto – that stuff is going to be buried very deeply in your unconscious.

Interviewer: What is that teaching that says that you are fixed in Christianity?

Quinn: Well, that you have a soul and you've got sin on that soul. And that's why God's got to go on the cross. You can’t save yourself.

Interviewer: So the only way is to have faith to save yourself?
Quinn: Yes, to believe in God.

Interviewer: Therefore you are fixed. Therefore it is not up to you to do anything much unlike in Buddhism which is up to you.

Quinn: But I think the fixed way of looking at things is more widespread in Western societies. It’s not just Christianity. I think you can factor science into it and everything ... you know the notion that we are fixed solid entities. Individualism.

Interviewer: Has not the ideas of logic and reason of the Enlightenment swept some of these ideas aside or marginalised them?

Quinn: I’d say so. But you may know it intellectually but at a psychological level there is a very deep lingering serious of fixed views.

Interviewer: Fascinating.

Quinn: Again, Buddhism has helped me sit more lightly with myself. You know, I think it does that. It makes you more fluid, more interconnected. The Buddha taught that you’re neither a self nor not a self. I understand that now but that still blows most Western people’s minds. They haven’t got a clue what you’re saying when you say that. You’re neither a self nor not a self. That notion that you can experience yourself as a separate entity but in reality you’re not, you’re just part of everything else. Again a Western person might understand that at an intellectual level, and that’s easy because ecology teaches that, but at a deeper level, “Oh no, I’m a self.” And you think of individualism in the West, the separate self with the soul lasts forever and goes to heaven or goes to hell – all of that is like a fixed way of looking at things. And then Newtonian physics that everything is absolutely separate building blocks and all of that. I think if you add all of that together then the Western mindset is prone to this very rigid, inflexible way of looking at things. You know like the attitude to criminals that they can never be changed. They go to prison and they’ve go to be punished. Whereas Angulima, he became enlightened!

Interviewer: Incarceration is such a waste. There are better ways but that’s a different issue.

Quinn: But there are books coming out these days on Western psychology and Buddhism addressing these issues for Western psychology. There’s even an expression called ‘psychological bypassing’ that Western people who train in purely Asian forms of Buddhism bypass themselves psychologically. There’re many famous American Buddhist teachers who study with Ajahn Chah in Thailand but they disrobed eventually and came back to the West because they said that even though he was a wonderful meditation master and they learnt wonderful meditation technique they weren’t coming to terms with their own conditionings, their Western conditions. And one example was quoted in the
book I’m thinking of ‘Psychology of Awakening’ and ‘Thought without a Thinker’ by Epstein. That’s a very good analysis. For example that teaching of the Buddha that you neither exist nor do not exist, he says that Western psychotherapy is more geared to making the Western person feel that the self does exist and doesn’t use suffering or psychological trauma as a way to help people reveal the non-self.

Interviewer: This would make sense.

Quinn: But can you see that even an institution like Western psychology is trying to create a fixed self! We can’t deal with the notion that we don’t exist.

Interviewer: Yes, but Western people have a long historical, cultural background and they can’t get away from that. They are ordinary people trained in psychology not enlightened or anything.

Quinn: But if you consider that that’s our main tradition of healing in the West, it’s more geared up - he making the point, Epstein - to keeping the notion of a self alive rather than the notion that you can go beyond that and experience the non-self as well.

Interviewer: The non-self would be a very difficult concept for them.

Quinn: Frightening, yeah.

Interviewer: Yes, frightening. And where would they get it from anyway?

Quinn: That’s the other point I feel very strongly about. Westerners we are overwhelmingly externally oriented in a utilitarian relationship with the world. We’re frightened and unfamiliar with the inside and of course in Christianity up til a couple of decades ago meditation was unknown when I was brought up as a kid. I read books in school that turned me on to meditation when I was 14. Still, I get e-mail to the website saying that if you meditate you will encounter the Devil and stuff like that. So it was taught by Christians as almost a bad thing to do, to meditate. But it just reinforces this notion that Western people are not at home in themselves. They’re ill at ease with entering within. It’s unfamiliar territory and therefore frightening. We’ll often discuss in the class that some people can’t exist in the day without the radio on or something like that.

Interviewer: Do you think that the environment being externalised in sustainability is part of the same problem?

Quinn: Yes. I actually argue in that paper that part of the problem ... you know, you’re not building a sustainable self if you’re not going within and encountering all the sort of sub-personalities and the visions within your own nature. You’re actually in a state of disintegration. We teach that one of the main aims of meditation is to become more integrated. Now what I argued in the paper that how can you building a sustainable self if you’re disintegrated? Disintegrated
people kill themselves! That’s not sustaining yourself! Again I think, and this has surely been part of my experience through meditating, is that the more you go within the more you learn that you aren’t a solid self. What I often say to the students in the courses I’m teaching is that your ego, yourself, becomes transparent and you see it as sort of a useful organising principle. Whereas in most people it’s taken them over like Frankenstein. It’s become an entity, a solid, congealed entity that takes them over. And so their relationship with the world becomes exploitative and so on. Because once you’ve got – this is Master Ching – a self and a non-self, which is more important? Number 1? Number 1 or number 2? So I guess what I’m saying is because Western people have not got a tradition of inner meditation … in fact, they would dismiss that tradition in the East as navel-gazing! Have you heard that expression? The whole of Western tradition has been one of commerce, working – again that’s Christian, you must work and accumulate wealth and all of that. They would encounter Eastern countries like the British went to India and see these men sitting down and they would say that’s navel-gazing – they’re completely wasting their lives, they should be out there ploughing the fields. What I’m saying is there’s Western cultural values up to recently that are even dismissive or anti doing that sort of stuff. You know. Whereas if you’re doing God’s work you should be out there working and accumulating money and not … idle hands make the Devil’s work, that sort of thing. If you’re sitting around doing nothing, just navel-gazing, then you’re in the realm of the Devil. This psychological bypassing concept, there is a very amusing example of it. I think in ‘Psychology of Awakening’ they talk about a again an American or Western woman who got very heavily involved in Tibetan Buddhism even went on very long retreats or lived for 9 years in Tibet in monasteries in Nepal. And she went on a holiday in Paris and was married within 6 months! This was an example in the book. You know all that training in Tibetan Buddhism hadn’t helped her come to terms with the fact of her own conditioning. As soon as she met a guy in Paris she fell in love with him and was married and had kids. They quote that as psychological bypassing. That engagement with tradition Asian Buddhism doesn’t necessarily help you come to term with your own psyche. And I’ve even heard of Thai monks here in Australia going to TAFE to learn Western psychology about how the self is socially constructed because they’ve never learnt that in Thai Buddhism. In a way it’s irrelevant if you’re living in Thailand practicing Buddhism. But here it’s not.

Interviewer: Going back to the previous question, you’ve been practicing for 20 odd years now, are there any defining moments that have impacted your life?

Quinn: It’s almost like you need these as questions you can go away and think about with the answers. I find it difficult to answer them on the spot. I think of a whole series of peak experiences throughout my life that had been defining ones. I did write this all down when I was on this retreat reflecting on our lives being a mythic journey. Then you could see all these events stretching over time, that had been defining experiences. I can try and give you a couple now. One was when I was very young and I can remember lying on the grass somewhere in the park and looking at the clouds in the sky and thinking … I though I could see the face of God or something like that, but it was sheer ecstasy, a feeling of sheer
ecstasy. Another example was in that chapel in the morning with the monks chanting Gregorian chants and candles and incense. Looking back that spontaneous dhyana experiences. Another ... when I was 14 or so ... I was brought up in nature on a farm and you many times just running through the fields and being out in nature was feelings of ecstasy, of beautiful rivers ... we often believe that kids are often in dhyanic states. I'm sure I was in the countryside, in nature. And that engendered this very strong interest in the environment and geography. Another defining experience was when I was at a Catholic high school in Sydney and I was in the library. I was a bit of a bookworm, did a lot of study. And I came across a book – this is back in the fifties – written by a Jesuit on yoga and actually mentioned meditation. And from that age I started to meditate and practice yoga underneath the Hills Hoist, you know the clothesline.

Interviewer: So you started meditating then?

Quinn: If you think back there were these early child experiences. There were religious experiences in the Catholic mass in the chapel. Then at the age of 14 I discovered within the Catholic school a book written by a Catholic Jesuit priest on yoga and meditation as a way of raising the level of consciousness. So I started to do that and I think that was the beginning of the end of Catholicism for me, quite frankly. Because he actually defined meditation as higher states of consciousness and things like that.

Interviewer: That book is probably locked up or burnt by now.

Quinn: I can't believe they let a book like that on the shelves those days. So there’s a thread of mystical experiences and a fascination with ... a very strong belief in me from an early age, may be not a conscious belief, that there’s more to life than meets the eye. That there is a mysterious realm. I also think that is part of my Irish heritage. The Irish have always been very spiritual people. That’s the trouble and they got smacked by Catholicism. As nature evoking spiritual experiences and that began to come into my academic career ... that’s the area where I’m still most fascinated by: place and spirit.

Interviewer: What does Buddhist ethic mean to you? How is it practiced or applied?

Quinn: The major attraction to many Western people including myself is that Buddhist ethics aren’t commandments. They are training principles which you voluntarily undertake and Western people really like the definitions kulusa and akusula (skilful and unskilful) and the notion that anything you do that makes you happier and other people happier is skilful, and anything you do that makes you unhappy or other people unhappy is unskilful. And this notion that if you have been unskilful stop and go back to being skilful - instead of using the unskilful act as a way of defining yourself as a failure. A Buddhist monk in China once quoted a Haiku poem which my wife translated and it really had quite an impact on me. The poem was basically: ‘No matter how far you swim out in the bitter sea, you
can always turn back to the shore, put down the killing knife.’ That is a very refreshing attitude for a Westerner that no matter how bad you’ve been you can just simply turn around and the other way. This is very hard for the Western mind to take on board. That’s very attractive about Buddhist ethical principles.

Interviewer: Do you keep them? To what extent do you apply them?

Quinn: I take them everyday. I take the *pancasila*, the 5 precepts, everyday and try to keep them. You know, I undertake the training principle of, I usually express it as, not to take the life of any living being but I then say also not to act aggressively. I undertake the training principle not to take that which is not given including non-exploitation, not using people. I undertake the training principle not to indulge in sexual misconduct which in the West these days is usually interpreted as neurotic attachment to sex. Western people are very neurotically attached to sex. You have these guys, film stars like Michael Douglas, coming out and saying, “I’m a sex addict” now. So the traditional sexual misconduct was abduction, rape and adultery. In the West these days it’s more interpreted as neurotic sexual addiction. Like gay guys, a lot of them are Buddhists but they have a huge problem with sexual addiction. The fourth precept: not to engage in unskilful speech. Fifth precept: not to become intoxicated. I do drink but I try not to become intoxicated! And then we take the positive precepts which are:

- With deeds of loving-kindness, I purify my body.
- With open-handed generosity, I purify my body.
- With stillness, simplicity and contentment, I purify my body.
- With skilful communication, I purify my speech.
- With mindfulness clear and radiant, I purify my mind.

I just use that as a checklist each day especially usually stillness, simplicity and contentment as a way of undermining not just sexual pleasure but pleasure in general, you know. “I don’t need this drink – I’m quite content.” Let me experience myself sitting here being happy, instead of automatically reaching for the drink or something like that. So I take those each day. I took a vow in the Order to do that, to meditate and take the precepts each day. So I try and do that.

Interviewer: When did you take these vows?

Quinn: About 6 years ago. But if I don’t keep it up I don’t feel very guilty any more. That’s been a very important thing to learn to overcome irrational guilt. I keep coming back to that don’t I. It’s been one of the most important thing. One of the order member even said to me once - because he knew that I had a problem in this area – he said, “Say to yourself when you do the *metta*, ‘I’m alright just as I am despite everything.’” It’s very refreshing you know. I still use it every time I do *metta* I use that. Again that’s a foreign idea, to my conditioning and I suspect to a lot of Western people, that actually despite everything I’m alright. Sometimes you’ve acted unskilfully and maybe got drunk or something and you’re wife will come to you the next day and criticise you, but she’ll say,
“But you’ve got a good heart. I know you’re a good man.” And you think am I really? You know that’s very refreshing that despite everything you’re alright and that your faults or weaknesses are a fraction of your total potentials, of your Buddha nature. They’re very refreshing concepts! In terms of the environment, we in the West usually interpret the first precept as vegetarianism. And I’ve been a vegetarian for 26 years. Again there’s been so many events in my life that were turning points. When I was with Master Lu I used to argue with the other guys who were arguing for vegetarianism, non-killing animals and all that other stuff. I would argue with them because I was still eating meat. And then one day in an aeroplane, looking out of a window, I just thought it through and said, “No,” I can’t justify eating meat to myself any more. And I remembered an incident when I had a rifle aimed at a rabbit out on my uncle’s farm. I was about to squeeze the trigger and I looked at it and it was beautiful. And I couldn’t squeeze the trigger. I thought there was no way I was going to kill that. My mind went back to that incident when I was a kid, teenager, at the age of 30 that’s when I convinced myself to become a vegetarian. I said, “No, you don’t believe in killing animals.” So then like a lot of Western people we do not support the cattle industry, the beef industry. So we extend traditional Buddhist ethics to ethical principles like not supporting supermarket chains that have meat and not buying leather coats, like women buy fur coats. A lot of Western Buddhists are trying to reflect their ethics in their shopping behaviour, how they spend money and so on. So I try and do that.

Interviewer: In terms of taking the vows 6 years ago, I’m not quite clear what that involves?

Quinn: This was a simple ceremony where you publicly display that you would be prepared to do certain things and one of them was to take daily the precepts and another was to meditate daily, few things like that. We also put a lot of emphasis on Right Livelihood as a way of expressing your ethics. So I have consciously chosen to be in the field of environmental education and helping people grow the whole of my life. I think that is very ethical. I think it has earned me a lot of good karma. And even before I come down here to teach – like I teach Buddhist meditation courses – I will often say to myself: “Now be absolutely sure you’re not doing this for egotistical reasons, to seem like a clever teacher. You’ve come here to help people.” I think it’s part of my personality. I think people say I’ve always genuinely helped people. I like to help people. So I think my whole academic career in environmental education was ethical. And I think what I’ve been doing here is ethical.

Interviewer: Do you believe that Buddhism has supported your career in environmental education ... that this career is correct?

Quinn: ... is skilful. Yes. As a phenomenologist, I’m a great believer ... my whole academic career has been centred around raising the level of people’s consciousness, of clarifying taken-for-granted beliefs and values. I believe that education is that: developing critical awareness of your taken-for-granted beliefs and values instead of being a conditioned robot. I’m very passionate about that:
my whole academic career has been about that and I now want to step out into a broader arena to do that through books and website, because I cannot stand the right wing tendency in the Australian government at the moment, you know, all the Western democracies. I think it’s terrible. I think there’s never been a greater need for raising the level of people’s consciousness. There’s fascism, you know, the way they’re treating the detainees, all these sorts of things. And as a society we’ve become so materialistic, so conservative ... the students now are so conservative, offensive, rationalise their selfishness like you wouldn’t believe. That’s what the Buddha taught. He taught that most people’s views or opinions were rationalisation for their sense desire. I had a chat with a young guy the other day. He said, “I’m not going to feel guilty about Australian Aboriginals and what my forefathers did to them. I didn’t do it; it’s my forefathers.” I said, “It’s not the point to feel guilty. It’s just to acknowledge that it happened.” “Ah no, no, no!” They just don’t want to know. They’ve just become very conservative and self-centred. They want to shut down the museum of aboriginal history and all this sort of thing. They want to redefine Australian history as all about Anzac and patriotism – typical right wing tendencies, and that drives me up the wall. So I’ve got not only an environmental conscience but a social one as well. To me, if you are helping society by raising that level of consciousness then that’s ethical. It’s a broader definition of the Buddhist ethics. I guess it’s generosity and mental clarity. The 3 things that underpin skilful behaviour are: loving-kindness, generosity and mental clarity. Confusion is one of the 3 poisons, isn’t it? And people are confused! So if you’re out there making people more self aware, more mindful, in a way you’re acknowledging the fifth precept. You’re spreading it aren’t you. You know even when I’m teaching Tai Chi, you know, you teach the Tai Chi form ... I’ve been teaching that for years and years and years to people and sometimes you get sick of it – showing the same movement to a new person! Again, I will just make myself do it as an act of generosity and patience.

Interviewer: Taking those precepts 6 years ago, has that brought changes as well as tensions or conflicts as well?

Quinn: Yes. Like sometimes, you drink too much [laugh]. I was brought up in an Irish family and everyone drinks. And we were brought up that it was OK to get drunk sometimes. You might do that sometimes and you feel guilty because you broke the fifth precept. But then you’ve got to do the Buddhist thing and say. “Doesn’t matter.” Get out of the guilt and get back to not doing that. Don’t beat yourself about it.

Interviewer: So the tension is there. You’re trying to not to break the precepts but sometimes we do unskilful actions and we break it.

Quinn: But again it’s become an issue in the West. It was written up in dharma life, one of the magazines, that a lot of Western Buddhists come very depressed to the point where they have to get psychological counselling because they feel that they’re failing in their own eyes. This is in an article written by an Order member in the UK who is a psychiatrist and they spend a lot of time within the Buddhist movement working with people who have become distressed and
depressed with themselves because they feel they’re failing to live up to the ideals of Buddhism.

Interviewer: Sounds like a Christian hang-up to me.

Quinn: Yes it is. How can you be brought up in the West without having Christian hang-ups?

Interviewer: But unless you are enlightened it is impossible to be skilful all the time.

Quinn: Ah, sure. That has been another breakthrough for me personally from Sangharakshita. This statement where he says, “You’re going to fail 10 times, 20 times, 100 times, 1000 times. That’s not important; making the effort is what’s important.” And where I think he’s made a major contribution ... one of his major teachings is that until we reach stream entry the forces of our conditioning are going to pull us back every time we’ve stopped making effort. Yes? That’s how strong they are. Til that force of inertia, that backward pulling sense of conditioning in us, is finally broken which occurs at the stage of stream entry and the change there is permanent, the basic rule he has taught is that every time you stop making effort you go backward. That has been a major important teaching for me. If I am failing – you know how I would call failing in the old fashion way – if I look at why it is simply because I am not practicing Buddhism any more. I’ve stopped making the effort. And personally I think that is another major important teaching for Western people, this notion that failure is not important; it’s making the effort that’s important. Because there is this predisposition again that as soon as you fail you feel guilt, and you even use, like these people who need psychological counselling in that article, the ideals and the precepts to help condemn yourself as a failure. Obviously they’ve got it the wrong way round but can you see how that can become a major issue for some people. They get very depressed. It’s fixed self-view again. They’ve defined themselves in a fixed way that I’m a failure because I’m not living up to the Buddhist precepts or ideals.

Interviewer: What about lying/false speech?

Quinn: I like that teaching very much. We define skilful speech as truthful, useful, affectionate and promoting concord. And unskilful speech such as lying, aggressive, promoting discord and useless. Again this is refreshing for me. You know, it is not just lying and not lying, it is whether it is useful speech or useless speech. Like most, people I am regularly breaking that [precept] especially at home: you lose your temper with your daughter or something like that. I mean a Chinese wife sees her role in life as criticising you [laughter]. I saw a Jackie Chan moving recently and in it he plays Chinese Cantonese and French. And the guy says to him that you don’t speak French as well as your Cantonese. And Jackie Chan says, “My father French not speak much. My mother Chinese never shut up.” So it is very hard with her sometimes. She nags. And for Europeans, you hate nagging. I get very cranky sometimes with that. But she’s breaking her
precepts. She doesn’t realise it – I have to point that out to her sometimes. But that is a very interesting area when you reflect on what you are doing with your speech, whether you’re using it or telling white lies. I think I tell white lies quite often.

Interviewer: If a white lie is constructive, then I think it would be construed as positive action.

Quinn: Have you heard of the ‘power mode’ and ‘love mode’ which are from Eric Fromm. Well he defined these major modes. We say ... the Buddha’s precepts are based on love mode but the world we live in is dominated by the power mode. So sometimes you have to use the power mode – you don’t let some people walk all over you and so you’d be assertive back to them. So we say that it’s OK to use the power mode as long as it is subjugated to the love mode. For example, if you are doing something unskilful to me and I start being really firm and assertive that’s fine as long as my motive is not hatred. If my motive is I still care for you as a human being but I must stop you from doing this unskilful thing, then that’s OK. So I think another refreshing thing for Western people about Buddhist ethics is that they’re very flexible in their interpretation. We discuss issues such as abortion, euthanasia and even situations where you have to kill to prevent other people from being killed. You know it always comes back to the motive. And I think that’s quite hard for Western people to get round their head. If you talk about me personally just to learn to be able to ask yourself, “What really is my motive for doing this? What really is my motive?” Like I said when I come here to the classes, what’s my motive? Is it I want to show off and be patted on the head, or am I genuinely here out of loving-kindness and generosity? I think that’s one thing you can learn from the precepts: you really reflect. You can be silly about it too. Like we got broken into not long ago and we decided to put a sign up outside ‘No cash held in premise’ and one of the members here who was a bit pedantic said, “Ah no, that’s breaking the fourth precept,” because we do keep cash on the premise. That’s being formalistic. But I said, “No, the motive is stop robbery and violence!” So that’s like a white lie: you have a sign saying ‘No cash held in premise’ but there is cash. But he was saying we can’t do that because we’re breaking the fourth precept.

Interviewer: I’ve never thought of that because I have a sign saying Burglar Alarm when I don’t have it.

Interviewer: Lastly, are you being ordained in FWBO?

Quinn: I have been going to ordination retreats. And you become ordained in the FWBO if they think you’re going for refuge has become effective in your life. Sangharakshita says that the central act in a Buddhist’s life is going for refuge in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha). So in the FWBO you become ordained in the in the Western Buddhist Order when other order members are sure that you’re going for refuge has become effective in your life – it’s actually really working.
Interviewer: Is there anything more because some of the members shave their head?

Quinn: No. Some of them do but that of course is very fashionable these days, men shaving their heads.

Interviewer: Is their monkhood?

Quinn: No it's just order member. I'm someone who has taken the vows to practice the precepts and meditate, and then the next thing is to become an order member, doesn't matter whether you're male or female.

Interviewer: Ordained is an order member?

Quinn: Yes.

Interviewer: So a member is a title, no, something given to by others.

Quinn: If you’ve convinced people that you’ve got ... if going for refuge has become effective in your life then you become ordained which means you are seriously practicing Buddhism. It’s the Western equivalent of becoming a monk. We don’t think of wearing robes that were worn 2,500 years ago in India. It just seems irrelevant to Western lifestyle. So we will wear ordinary clothes and we’ll put a kasa on and they’re held in high regards as people who demonstrated that they are seriously practicing Buddhism. And in some ways the ordination process they go through is considered more rigorous than what some men do to become a monk.

Interviewer: It’s the equivalent of without the cultural baggage if you like.

Quinn: Yes but a lot of Asian monks will not consider them the equivalent. There’s a lot of cultural prejudice. Some Asian monks don’t even think Westerners can be Buddhists – there’s arrogance. But at the moment I’ve go doubt whether I want to continue with the ordination process, or whether I want to become part of the movement. I am going through a personal period of introspection where I’m redefining myself as ... I don’t like being in organisations. I’m a loner. I like being outside organisations. And when I look at some of the people in the ordination process it’s like they’re joining a club, you know. They’re really nice people. Some of them are good friends but something in me wants to express my Buddhism in a different way. Maybe I’m more academic.

Interviewer: OK, we can stop here. Thank you very much

Part 2 – Further comments after formal finish of interview

Quinn: Environment as what your conscious of every minute of the day. That’s your real environment, which is very phenomenological, very existentialist. So I used to teach that if you’re relating to that environment, the one your
experiencing minute by minute, harmoniously and ethically then you’re discharging your environmental and ethical responsibilities. That’s the bare minimum. A lot of our environmental students wanted to go out and save the whale, save the environment, what I call the external interface, and they were neglecting the immediate environment and their own inner environment. That where the hypocrisy can come in. You know, as a Buddhist, you should be working first on yourself and you inner environment and then spreading that to your immediate environment, human and non-human. And that can be expressed all sorts of lifestyle ways like I put in that paper: permaculture, recycling, shopping bags ... one can talk forever about that sort of stuff.

Part 3: Further comments on marriage

Interviewer: What do you think about marriage and having children?

Quinn: One of the order members is a good friend of mine. He could have got married a couple of times and had kids. Even though they were wonderful women and he likes children and he is a doctor, he has decided, and he is a good-looking man ... you could say a wonderful catch for a woman, he’s not interested. 9 out of 10 times he has had to end the relationship with the woman because they want to get married and have children. So the really serious people tend to be single and not have children.

Interviewer: But for you ...

Quinn: We’re not against having children. A lot of married people argue that children provide you with a good opportunity to practice ethics and so on. The Buddha taught that parents are in the four brahmaviharas. Do you know the four brahmaviharas? Metta, karuna, mudita and ubekha. And he said that fill all those states for their children. So they’re already in the god realms in the brahmaviharas. So he encouraged them to use that opportunity with the children to carry over to all people. So in FWBO, they say that lifestyle in not important ... commitment is primary; lifestyle secondary. So you may be a monk who is not very committed or you might be a Western married couple who are actually very committed. That’s what we say: commitment is primary; lifestyle is secondary. Some order members single living in men’s community, some women are single living in women’s community although they may have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Other order members are married, sometimes just the husband or the wife or sometimes both. In fact very recently they’re just beginning to design a special wedding ceremony for within the Buddhist movements. And some of the order members become anagorokist, that’s when they’ve taken the vows of chastity and frugality. And those guys will wear a yellow robe on occasions on a retreat or something like that. So they’ve decided to give up sexual relationships and live simple lives.

Interviewer: So they are the more serious practitioners?
Quinn: In a way and they wear a yellow kasa where as the ordinary order members where white ones.

**Correspondence**

E-mail (24 May 2005): My summary and questions to Quinn. (His responses are in italics.)
Dear Quinn,

Attached is a brief summary of our interview. Please take time to read it. Should there be any corrections or additions please feel free.

*My computer couldn't read the left hand document file. Could read the left hand one. There are many other meditation practices in the FWBO e.g. vipassana (insight) practices like the 6 elements one and visualisation practices. We tend to teach Mindfulness of Breathing and Metta Bhavana to beginners at centres like ours to help develop sane, healthy, human beings initially.*

I'd use the expression dislike rather than hate the self.

I have a few questions to ask you:

Do you have a brief work history (resume) I can have?
Yes I've attached that.

Can you spell Master Ching's full name?
His full name is the late Master Ching Yang. You have not spelt Sangharakshita correctly either.

Zen mindfulness – is it alienated as according to FWBO or the quickest way to enlightenment as you mentioned also?
*I said there is a danger it can be done in an alienated way. A Chinese monk told me they considered it the fastest or most direct way to get Enlightened but very demanding in its approach - too hard for most.*

Why would you want to experience e.g. anger fully?
*What I said was that the energy of strong emotions like anger can be captured and transformed into more skilful ones like metta. To do this you have to experience it fully to get in touch with the energy contained in it. Great anger can become great love.*

And surely even Western people including you have experienced this before Buddhism. Experiencing emotions is only to get to know it so you see it coming before it consumes you?
*Of course - this is part of mindfulness. But as in the second stage of Right Effort you sometimes have to eradicate unskilful mental states that have already arisen and one way to do this is what I outlined above. It is a Tibetan approach to*
capture and transform the energy of unskilful emotions - you want to experience it to get hold of its energy to transform it.

Do you think that Western women are also emotionally constipated as well?
I think constipated is a bit of a strong word. Usually we think of women being more in touch with their emotions than men, who tend to repress more. The point I was making to you is that Western people, according to Sangarakshita, can tend to be over-developed intellectually and under-developed emotionally. That doesn't mean we're not emotional - being from an Irish background I have very strong emotions. It's more about knowing them better so as to be able to handle and manage them better (as in Daniel Goleman's book "Emotional Intelligence"). It's getting the balance between emotion and reason right. Also as part of our Western conditioning (through Christianity and Freud) Westerners tend to be confused about self-love and lack of self-esteem. Because of our busy lifestyles these days as well there can be a tendency to be alienated from our emotions. But I think you have to be careful not to make generalisations and comparison between East and West as the comment above implies. Easterners can be emotionally constipated too (e.g. Chinese Confucian ethic). Traditionally in Chinese families the most neurotic tend to be the eldest son and the youngest daughter it has been found. All I was saying is that we have to come to terms with our Western conditioning if we are to grow and quite often traditional Asian Buddhism doesn't understand Western conditioning fully enough. That's not to say that Asians don't have their own problems to do with their cultural conditioning. Buddhism has always stressed a balance between reason and emotion. I have heard Sangharakshita imply that Indian people can be very emotional and lack reason. He said something like "if they love you they love you; if they hate you they'll kill you."

Terrorism and fundamentalism is about strong emotions (blind belief) that are blind because they lack the element of reason.

I can't really see where this material relates to the environmental content of your thesis.

My E-mail reply (14 June 2005)
Thank you for your clear answers. I think you have very clear answers to a complex and difficult problem.

As for your question on what this has to do with the environmental component, the answer is 1) everything because inner ecology reflects directly into outer ecology, 2) my PhD is much more about personal sustainability than specifically environmental sustainability. I believe the paramount factor in achieving sustainability including environmental sustainability is personal well-being. As Buddhist, our technique is to transcend the existential paradigm, because the ordinary world which most people inhabit is often based on illusions and negative conditioning. When people see things more in line with truth then many issue concerned with global sustainability can be solved. This is why I focus on meditation e.g. your experience in overcoming destructive Catholic condition.
Quinn’s E-mail reply (22 June 2005)
Yes I understand where you’re coming from. One idea that you may want to take on board (that someone once mentioned to me) is that, of course ultimately, from a Buddhist point of view, nothing can be sustained, which Mick Common in his book on ecological economics defined as “to support without collapse”; or as another dictionary definition puts it “to cause to continue”. Not the environment nor the self. As you know everything is subject to impermanence and is insubstantial so ultimately all collapses and does not continue. The Buddhist aim is to get beyond such a conditioned world. One of the most intriguing things the Buddha also raised was that “there is a neither a self, nor not not a self”. You may want to address this point in your PhD too? I didn’t in my paper but would like to follow it up one day in my writing.

My e-mail on ideas of personal sustainability (7 July 2005)
You are absolutely right in your analysis. This is a very difficult issue to grapple with and it takes a long time for tentative answers to emerge. My line of thinking is at the moment:
- at the basic level, individual human sustainability is about 1) maintaining reasonably health so the body can function efficiently, 2) developing your mind in such a way so you can experience happiness and joy with the least external input or most effective way (efficiency which we can experience forms of happiness)
- for me, enlightenment can be considered the ultimate in sustainability because 1) as you say, one moves to the unconditioned state, 2) one benefits all other sentient beings and therefore is the highest form of contribution to their well-being and sustainability.

Quinn’s E-mail reply 12 February 2007
Here are the replies to your questions below (Quinn’s answers in italics):

I have some related questions on personal sustainability as we discussed in the interview:

1) In the interview you said that during metta bhavana you experienced negative subconscious gossip to do with self-dislike, feeling a failure or questioning self-love (see transcript below). Did metta bhavana assist you in dealing with this? If so, how? And if not, did anything help?

I experienced this negative subconscious gossip when I first started doing the practice. The metta bhavana very much helped dealing with this. It helped me develop a much softer, patient and more affectionate relationship with myself. Again I think that, like a lot of Western people, I had a rather hard, judgemental, ‘external’, intellectual way of relating to myself. Now I feel it is more caring, ‘internal’, softer, less judgemental and more relaxed, forgiving and tolerant. All together a much more positive way of relating to myself. I think this is one of the most profound changes that Buddhism and practices like the metta bhavana have worked on me. The feedback from students who do the meditation courses
I teach has been very similar. The practice has also helped many of them transform their relationships with difficult people (4th stage). The other tendency I think we have in the West, which is related to our overly intellectual approach to everything, is when dealing with negative, unskilful mental states we tend to neurotically obsess and introspectively analyse them – “Why am I like this? What’s wrong with me?, etc.” Student feedback confirms this. I think the metta bhavana practice, plus teaching we use like the five mental hindrances and their antidotes, helps us deal with these states in a much more matter-of-fact, down-to-earth way. Not taking them too seriously or catastrophising them – “this is a hindrance that is present, let's chose one of the antidotes and transform or manage it!” Overall, the teachings of impermanence and insubstantiality, have also helped a lot to break up negative, fixed self-views - "No doer of the deed may be found, No one who ever reaps the fruit ... just bare phenomena roll on, Dependent upon conditions all." I also think Sangharakshita’s teachings have been very useful as he has pioneered making Buddhism relevant to handling/managing negative Western psychological conditioning. One of his teachings which has had a big impact on me is the recognition that failure is not important, we fail again and again, and will continue to do so because of our conditioning holding us back (till we reach the stage of Stream-entry), it is making effort despite failures that is important. Another saying, which I like to think is typically Irish I use a lot is “Blessed are those who can laugh at themselves, for they will find themselves an endless source of amusement!” I could go on and on. But one last fact that crops up again and again on the meditation and Buddhist courses, and that has been directly addressed by Western Buddhist authors in their written works, is that we are conditioned in the West to consider unpleasant emotions and feelings unacceptable - so we tend to cut off from them, repress them, deny them etc. It is an eye-opener for many people who attend the courses that meditation is about not running away from unpleasant mental states, but "owning" them, working with them, transforming and processing them. Unfortunately meditation has become fashionable these days and there are a lot of wrong views (micha ditthis) around about what it is - many seem to have the impression it's just about relaxation and stress relief - I find we have to spell out that it is much more than that.

2) You said that you still struggle with the idea of self-love from time to time. Can you be more specific as how you deal with it e.g. what technique if any?

Just as I said above - recognising that it a hindrance, usually the 2nd one - ill will (self-hatred/anger) - and applying the antidote, for example, usually cultivating the opposite - self-metta. This has helped me connect with and build up a reservoir of positive emotion that seems to exist at a deeper level than my negative conditioning and goes right back to a happy childhood. I find now I can access that positive feeling and self-metta more or less at will. I also dwell more on positive emotions when they arise, which again in the West I think we tend to ignore or not notice because we don't live within enough. I feel more at ease with myself these days than I can remember at any past stage in my life.
3) Also you said that you don't dwell in self-hatred anymore if it arises. How do you stop dwelling i.e. What is it that you do now differently compared to before practicing Buddhism?

As above using one of the traditional antidotes, which we teach all preceded by recognition (self-awareness) that you're caught up in a hindrance and then 1) considering the consequences of staying in that state; 2) cultivating the opposite; 3) observing with a sky-like mind; 4) suppression. If all these fail going for refuge to the three jewels. I find that usually I can just shake it off, let go of it, fairly easily these days - just dealing with it in a matter-of-fact way and not taking it too seriously. A lot of this stuff overlaps with Golemen's concept of emotional intelligence, especially his 2nd category of managing emotions - I presume you're familiar with his work? (He's also a Buddhist).

The other thing I forgot to mention is that the practice of Ethics (Sila) also makes one feel more positive, happy and at ease. I need to do more of it!

E-mail reply to my question (9 March 2007)

1) What do you see as the purpose of your life (& has this changed over the years)?

I think it's about growing consciousness - mine and the communities - raising consciousness through teaching and writing. Phenomenology and existentialism have always been central methodologies/philosophies for me - they're about throwing 'taken-for-granted' beliefs and values into sharper relief, developing critical awareness, seeing the 'whole' picture, becoming an authentic individual, especially in relation to contemporary environmental and social issues, which are very similar to Buddhist goals to me.

Up to 1997 I was doing this mainly through university teaching and course writing. Then I got sick of teaching just university students and wanted to reach a wider community audience so started teaching Buddhism at TAFE and then set up the Buddhist centre to do this and that's been running successfully for 7 years now. However, because it's only evening work, I find myself struggling during the day in this semi-retired situation - it's hard to motivate oneself in a self-managing situation I've found and have heard similar stories from many other people when they put themselves in such a situation or retire from full-time employment.

So I'm currently reflecting on my core values and what direction I want to take with my life now at this age. It has been a useful discovery for me that you need to do this quite often in your life not just once every ten years and then just plod a long as I did in the past. I very much want to write and get published but that's not easy and I'm toying with setting up my own website to 'spread the word'. The personal discipline needed for this is a real struggle and represents one aspect of the 'working ground/cutting edge' of my spiritual practice these days. One good thing is that the self-metta I've developed over the years from my Buddhist practice is helping me be more patient with myself even when I get frustrated with my lack of discipline and effort.
2) What is YOUR purpose for practicing Buddhism?
When asked this many years ago my reply was "to end personal suffering". Which is of course what the four noble truths are about. I think the answer is still the same with perhaps the additional proviso of to also make my life more fulfilling. Also to help others achieve these ends as well.

The four great vows of a bodhisattva (below) seem very appealing to me (and many others in the FWBO) and relevant to what I'm doing and aiming to do as in Q.1 above:

1. To save all beings from difficulties
2. To destroy all spiritual defilements in my own mind and through advice of that of others
3. To learn the dharma in all its aspects, practice it and realise it, and teach it to others
4. In all possible ways help lead all beings in the direction of buddhahood/enlightenment

3) Has Buddhism influenced your position on the environment and environmental action? If so, how?
Yes it has as you read in my articles it helped clarify for me the deep source of the problem and therefore the solution. I remember Master Ching teaching that "because human beings are that part of nature which is conscious of itself and therefore capable of 'separating out' and thus manipulating itself then its moral duty is to manipulate nature in a way that allows for it's ever more harmonious evolution thus benefiting both man and nature." Instead because of the mistaken modern Western worldview we have been manipulating nature as if not only separate but superior to it and again as Master Ching used to say this time quoting Taoism, "You ignore the Tao at your own peril" – e.g. global warming. It's also helped me realise and teach that the solution with all social and environmental issues (from a Buddhist perspective) starts with the individual and their motives and whether they're skilful or unskilful because the actions deriving from them become manifest in the world as greed, aggression, disease, pollution, etc. At a more societal scale I teach that we need a more holistic relationship with nature (as we used to have). I used to say to uni students studying all sorts of professions that their chosen profession represents some sort of transaction/interaction with the environment. Therefore, depending on whether it was based on an ethical/holistic approach to that relationship or an unethical/dualistic one, every profession could be part of the solution or a cause of the problem. It was up to them. I encouraged the use of the formula of the four exertions as part of right effort in the noble eightfold path (stage 6) - prevent, eradicate unwholesome environmental interactions develop and maintain wholesome ones.

I hope this is useful and I corrected a few mistakes in your word document like several members of my family being priests only one was (thank god).
Written Articles
These are selected articles Quinn wrote for a local newspaper in approximate chronological order. Typographical errors have been left intact. Corrected ones are in [ ].

1999
The Mind - A Double-Edged Sword
Last week we established that Buddhism, unlike other religions, starts with the mind. The human mind is unique in that it has self-consciousness. This sets us apart from the other animals. Whilst the other animals are generally speaking simply aware through their senses and driven by their instincts we have what philosophers and psychologists refer to as 'reflexive' consciousness. If you look the word 'reflexive' up in a dictionary you'll find it means to bend back on itself. In other words, we are not simply aware through the senses we are aware that we are aware. The mind bends back on itself and can look into itself. Because we are aware of something being aware we have consciousness of a self. We are taught to label this 'something being aware' as the 'self' or 'I' from an early age. Now once we become aware of ourselves as a self we experience that self as separate from everything else. Because we experience ourselves as separate from everything else we can manipulate the world around us.

This is where the double-edged sword idea comes in. Self-consciousness allows us many advantages and creative potential. With it we have a sense of autonomy and can make choices and engage in purposeful behaviour to ensure our survival. We can make and build things and pass this knowledge on. We can reason, remember and imagine and all of these abilities come from the mind being able to look into itself. However, on the other hand, the experience of separation from everything else (including other people) is dangerous. If mistaken for a reality it becomes from a Buddhist point of view a dangerous delusion (moha). In fact, from this perspective nothing can actually be separated from anything else; everything is part of an interwoven flux of ever changing conditions. Ultimately the human being can not exist separate from the air they breath, the water they drink and the plant and animal world that sustains them. They are part of the natural environment. They also do not exist independently of other human beings; they depend on them for psychological nourishment and even our own individual personalities are shaped by our interactions with family and friends.

So the experience of separation is apparent rather than real. Einstein described it as a sort of optical delusion. From a Buddhist perspective it is a very useful illusion because it does enable us to manipulate things and thus helps ensure our survival. However, unless it is grounded in an actual experience of the unity of all things (which is part of the Enlightenment experience) it remains a very dangerous ability. Consider the consequences of manipulating the natural environment on the basis of a belief that it really is separate from us when in reality it is not?
**The Deluded Mind**

In the last article we saw how the fact that humans have self-consciousness is like a double-edged sword. It cuts two ways being, at one and the same time, the root of our creativity as well as our destructiveness. We are in a highly paradoxical position as a result of having self-consciousness. We are part of Nature, part of biological evolution, but that part which is conscious of itself. Hence we experience ourselves as separate from the rest and yet we are not. The experience of separation enables us to manipulate the rest to a far greater extent than any other animal. Together with self-consciousness this experience of separation, which is inherent in self-consciousness, means human beings have tremendous power. We have more power in relation to other species and our own than any other living being. And yet we are part of Nature, part of evolution.

So we are in a difficult and paradoxical position. From a Buddhist perspective the experience of separation is considered apparent rather than real. If believed to be true, that is an actual separation or disconnection from the rest, then it is a delusion (*moha*). Unfortunately, because this predisposition is 'hard wired' into us (part of our physiological make up), we do as a species automatically fall foul of this delusion. However, the Buddha Dharma teaches that it is possible to escape the delusion. It is possible to resolve the paradoxical position of humans in a correct fashion.

Last week we posed the question of considering the consequences of manipulating the natural environment on the basis of a belief that it really is separate from us, when in fact it isn't? If it really is separate from us we can do anything we like to it without fear of consequence, like for example changing the physical and chemical properties of the atmosphere. The fact that this inevitably rebounds on us (the perpetrator) as pollution, acid rain and global warming simply indicates that we are not separate from it in the first place.

Unfortunately when we look around the world today we can only conclude that our Western worldview has reinforced a belief in this deluded view that we really are separate. Environmental degradation is occurring on a scale never before witnessed in human history. When we look at the larger picture of geological time, there may have been eco-catastrophes in the past that drove species to extinction (e.g. meteor impacts), but never before has this been done by one species to other species and potentially to their own!

The materialistic worldview has also, in defining Nature as nothing other than collections of dead inert, matter, led to a disrespectful attitude to Nature. In Buddhism Nature is respected as profoundly alive and mysterious. We also live in very selfish times when people are encouraged to separate themselves out from each other more than ever before in human history. Next week we investigate from a Buddhist point of view how the delusion of separation creates these tendencies within the individual and how they are also the root cause of our own suffering.
The Three Poisons
Once self-consciousness creates the experience of separation between self and other, as discussed over the last few weeks, certain negative tendencies automatically follow. An unfortunate by-product of self-consciousness is that, because we do experience ourselves as separate, a deep, existential state of tension follows. It could be characterised as a deep sense of aloneness, incompleteness and therefore insecurity. It is very deep in the sense that it is 'hard-wired' into us. It comes, in other words, from our physiology, our senses and our brain, which enables the experience of consciousness of self and perceiving the world dualistically and fragmented into a myriad of separate objects.

According to the Buddhist teaching (Dharma), in order to overcome this tension or insecurity two primal tendencies arise—craving and aversion [must be addressed]. Craving plays the role of attempting to incorporate into our self-system, in order to give us more security, those things we perceive as pleasant. Aversion attempts to repel or push away the things we perceive as unpleasant and threatening to our self and its sense of security. This is what modern psychology describes as approach-avoidance tendencies inherent in perception. According to some psychologists we spend 80% of our time seeking 'love strokes' and the other 10% avoiding threats! Both these tendencies of craving and aversion are rooted in the basic delusion (moha) of separation which generates them. Together they are known in Buddhism as the three poisons, so named because not only do we experience the world as a delusion (dualistic and fragmented when in fact a whole) but they introduce a subjective filter that breaks the world up into pleasant, unpleasant, attractive etc. [that] poison the mind.

The Possibility of Change
Last week we discussed the negative tendencies that automatically arise in the human mind because of our experience of separation from the Other. The experience of separation comes from self-consciousness and we try to overcome the tension created by this by craving the pleasant and repelling the unpleasant. In this way we try to secure our fragile ego. Traditionally, greed, aggression and ignorance operating within the human mind are known as the Three Poisons in Buddhism. These three poisons have now spread beyond the confines of the human mind to manifest as real, observable poisons effecting the global environment. The commentary on the Cakkavattisihananda Sutta of the Pali Canon, (thousands of years old; a sutta or sutra is a single teaching given by the Buddha on a specific theme), spells out this human-environment link between human morality (or lack of) and environmental consequences:

‘When humanity is demoralized through greed, famine is the natural outcome; when moral degeneration is due to ignorance, epidemic is the inevitable result; when hatred is the demoralizing force, widespread violence is the inevitable outcome.’

These tendencies, according to the sutra, contribute to an unsustainable situation and the end result is devastation and a shortening of the life span of the
population. A cursory review of the world today would suggest that all of the above negative situations are present around the world on scales never before witnessed in human history.

However, the sutra's discussion of the link between the human mind and the environment continues as follows:

'... If and when humanity realizes that the large-scale devastation has taken place as a result of its moral decline, a change of heart takes place ... As morality is renewed, conditions improve through a long period of cause and effect ...'

Buddhism has a cyclic view toward all natural phenomena. It considers that when people wake up to the fact that their actions are impacting negatively on their quality of life, there is a change of heart (down in the emotional realm). The situation described in the quote also fits what many people hope is happening at the moment throughout the worldwide community in relation to environmental issues.

Buddhism is (and always has been) very optimistic about the human condition and its potential to develop higher ethical sensibilities. This is possible within the individual as well as within society as a whole (as in the quote above). No matter how unskilful we have been, no matter how much we have allowed craving, aggression and confusion to drive us, we can always reverse the situation. A Buddhist monk I met once in China quoted me the following verse, which illustrates this point nicely:

No matter how far you swim out in the bitter sea,
You can always return to the beach.
Put down the killing knife!

In the West we tend to have a fixed view of the self - we are what we are; a leopard can't change it's spots, and so on. The Buddhist conception is much more fluid and positive. There is literally nothing we cannot make of ourselves.

*It is Fortunate to be born Human*
As we have seen, deeply ingrained in the human psyche is a fundamental delusion (moha) that we are apart from everything else. This produces the two primal tendencies of approach and avoidance, craving and aversion. These volitional tendencies or samskaras drive our habit energies and generates our karma that results in us becoming what we are today and what we'll become tomorrow. All of this is an unfortunate by-product of self-consciousness. But there are 'wholesome roots' or tendencies as well that are an inherent part of our nature. In a sense they are deeper still, because karmically they have resulted in us being born as humans. The Buddha considered this as highly fortuitous. He likened the probability of being born human to the probability of a small turtle rising from the floor to the surface of a vast sea just as a piece of wood with a
hole in it floated by. Imagine the probability that as the turtle stuck its head out of
the water it emerged through the hole in the wood. That's the probability of being
born human, said the Buddha.

Because humans have self-consciousness we can look into and control our
minds if we choose to. In other words, part of our karmic conditioning is that we
have self-awareness and volitional choice itself. Thus the human potential for
growth is unlimited from a Buddhist point of view. The fact that we can all also
potentially be very evil means that the matter can't be left to chance - the stakes
are too high. From a Buddhist perspective it's crucial to accept the challenge of
consciously encouraging our good impulses and transforming the negative.

However, people tend to be overly cynical about the ability of humans (including
themselves) to grow and be skilful. As stated last week the Western view of the
self tends to be a fixed one. The Buddhist view is that we can transcend the 'self',
the self that is causing the problems and our own suffering. This 'petty' self is
actually a fraction of our total being and our potential. In the Mahayana schools
of Buddhism this potential became described as our inherent 'Buddha Nature'.
We all have it as our birthright - it is the 'embryo' of Enlightenment. The latter
may be a long way off but spiritual change (a movement toward Enlightenment)
can start immediately if we so chose. We can thus see that the Buddhist
perspective on our basic human nature is profoundly optimistic.

We need to take heart in the Buddha's message that all obstacles, no matter
what they might be, really can be overcome. That we, whoever we may be, are
capable of overcoming them. In the longer-term course of one's life, there is no
limit - absolutely none, according to the Buddha - to what men and women can
make of themselves. This is the objective potential of being human. We all have
this enormous potential. It's worth reminding ourselves of this objective fact often;
otherwise our cynicism can undermine our natural self-confidence. Confidence
that we can change ourselves, at least by degrees, is the foundation of the whole
spiritual life. Buddhism distinguishes between 'worldly desire' (kammachanda)
and spiritual desire (dhammachanda) - the aim isn't to eliminate desire, but
craving.

**Meditation in Buddhism**

Continuing our review of the Threefold Path in Buddhism, we've seen to date that
the first stage, Ethics, sets up the right conditions for successful meditation.
Meditation is the second phase of this path. It subsumes Right or Perfect Effort,
Mindfulness and Concentration-the last three aspects of the Eightfold Path. We'll
return to them in a future issue.

In essence meditation in Buddhism is working directly on one's own mind. Remember the starting point of Buddhism is the human mind. So we do not
meditate just to relax or cope with stress, although these are welcome by
products of the practice. Last week we talked of the two great traditions in
Buddhist meditation of samatha (tranquillity) and vipassana (insight). Samatha
practices aim at making us more calm, tranquil and concentrated so that we can see things as they really are and thus gain insight into Reality.

The reason we don't see reality, or things as they really are, is because we are un-concentrated. Our minds are preoccupied and chronically distracted by discursive thoughts and a cavalcade of emotional reactions to things and events. Most of these if dug into reveal themselves to be concerned with our desires and longings and the frustrations of not satisfying them. There is thus a subjective filter, based on our egocentric view and our likes and dislikes, between us and how things actually are. Our view of things is clouded.

The aim of meditation is to purify the mind in the sense of clearing away these clouds of subjective distortion. To do this all the scattered energies within our psyches have to become integrated so that they are pulling together. The chaos in our conscious mind is mightily reinforced by the turmoil in our unconscious and all of this erupts in the mind to cloud it. These scattered energies can't be integrated until we become aware of them, or conscious of them. This is the aim of meditation.

Once we're aware or conscious of what's going on in our conscious mind and in the unconscious we're in charge of ourselves. Things calm down and a hitherto unknown state of tranquillity can be experienced. Once this happens we're on the way to seeing things as they are.

*Meditation - a Unity Experience*

We established at the beginning of this series of articles, that as human beings we experience ourselves as separate from everything else. This is a by-product of the unique human faculty of self-consciousness. We are in fact not separate from the environment and human society so the experience of separation is apparent rather than real. To mistake it for a reality, as we tend to do, is a fundamental delusion from a Buddhist point of view. When we do, it creates a deep sense of existential unease in us and that's why we get caught up in craving for pleasant things to secure ourselves. We feel incomplete and deep down seek a unity with all things.

One function of meditation is to help overcome this experience of separation and achieve unity. But ironically it starts off based on the experience of separation. The fact that we can reason and make choices is because we can separate ourselves out from ourselves—there is the 'reasoner' and what is being reasoned about. So we use this ability to convince ourselves of the desirability of meditating and then choose to sit down and meditate. Without this meditation cannot begin, so again it's a uniquely human enterprise. Once we start meditating on an object—the breath, an emotion, a candle—we are actually in an acute state of separation. There is you sitting there observing and concentrating and there is the thing you're concentrating on.

Paradoxically, if we persist then the separation disappears and we become 'one' with the object. So human beings are capable of both giving rise to an
experience of separation and of unity. Furthermore, once enlightened they are capable of experiencing both of these states simultaneously. Next week we will talk about how the unity experience in meditation is one of integrating all our scattered conscious and unconscious energies and how this in turn gives rise to higher states of consciousness.

**The Five Mental Hindrances**

The last couple of weeks we've been talking about the higher states of consciousness known as the dhyanas accessible through meditation. The first level of meditative absorption (dhyana) is characterised by the absence of negative emotions. We're going to elaborate on the nature of the five mental hindrances shortly. Unless the mind is clear not only of the five mental hindrances but also of fear, anger, jealousy, anxiety, guilt, remorse, at least for the time being, there is no entry into the higher states of consciousness. They have to be eradicated or suspended to achieve them. That is why the path of ethics described over preceding weeks is the necessary prerequisite for effective meditation.

The first of the five hindrances is desire for sense experience (kamma chandra). Our minds instead of concentrating on the meditation object (say the breath) keep getting drawn to sense objects through any of the six senses such as, sounds, smells or colours. But it also includes images and attractive thoughts, which are objects of what in Buddhism is known as the sixth sense, the mental sense. The traditional image of this hindrance is again water obscured by coloured balls.

The second hindrance is ill will (vyapada). This is actually the reverse side of desire for pleasant experiences because it wills or desires ill for something. Our minds this time get caught up in some painful experience. They are drawn towards some irritating event or person and we can't stop thinking about it or resenting it. Perhaps there is some external sound or smell that is irritating us. It's practically impossible to get away from sound when one meditates so it's a common experience to find one's mind reacting irritably to sounds. The traditional image is of water boiling and hissing. In these two hindrances we are strongly caught up in the object; this is less the case in the next three.

Over the next couple of weeks we'll outline the next three hindrances, investigate the traditional antidotes to apply to the five hindrances and how the hindrances are there outside of meditation as well.

**The Hindrances (Continued)**

As we saw last week the first two hindrances to becoming absorbed or concentrated in meditation are desire for sense experience (kamma chandra) and ill will (vyapada). The third hindrance is restlessness (uddhacca) and anxiety (kukucca). Restlessness is physical restlessness and turbulence; anxiety is more mental-usually some form of irrational, discursive thought. Together they make us too 'speedy' and obviously distract us from being able to concentrate. The traditional image is water chopped up into waves by the wind.
The fourth hindrance is sloth and torpor, the two aspects being physical sloth (thina) and mental torpor (middha). The body feels heavy and the mind vacuous. The combined result is drowsiness and before we know it we've tipped forward off our meditation cushions as we briefly fall asleep. When sloth and torpor gets a grip on us it feels almost impossible to shake off. The traditional image is stagnant water choked with mud and reeds. Again both these hindrances are two sides of the same coin and we can oscillate between them.

The final one is doubt (vicikicchā) and indecision. We start to doubt ourselves, the meditation practice, and whether we really can get anywhere in terms of our spiritual growth. As a result we have very little conviction or commitment to meditate. We sit there caught up in a crisis of doubt and lack of involvement in the practice. This image is turbid water, water with a great deal of sediment in suspension.

So these negative mental factors prevent us from becoming concentrated in our meditation session. They will inevitably arise for all who meditate because they are originate in mental tendencies, impulses and predispositions that have become habitual because they were built up over long periods of time. However, there are in Buddhism traditional antidotes to the five hindrances, but before we can apply them we have to recognise or acknowledge that we are caught up in a hindrance. This is a crucial step and failure to do it means the antidotes cannot be applied.

The Antidotes to the Hindrances
The first step in working on the hindrances is to acknowledge that the hindrance is actually there. It's no good carrying on meditating regardless, trying to ignore it or wish it away. In meditation you need to acknowledge each new mental state as it arises—that's what self-awareness is. So in terms of the hindrances this means to recognise which of the five mental hindrances (discussed over the last two weeks) it is.

Is it desire for sense experience, ill will, restlessness and anxiety, sloth and torpor, or doubt and indecision that is preventing you from deepening your concentration? To be able to recognise which hindrance is present in your mind takes time and practice. Meditation like any other skill requires practice and the more you do it the better you become at it. You will become not only more adept at concentrating but more aware of the nature of the mental events arising in your mind and whether they are skilful or unskilful.

It is after all a process of gaining self-knowledge by looking within. But for most of us this type of activity is unfamiliar, we are chartering unfamiliar waters, and so inevitably it involves a learning curve. It's a bit like the situation alluded to in the old western mottoes of 'Know thyself' and 'Physician heal thyself'.

The traditional Buddhist antidotes that are used to work with the hindrances, after the all-important step of recognition (self-awareness), are fourfold. They are 1) to consider the consequences of remaining in that state, 2) cultivating the opposite,
3) developing a sky-like attitude and 4) suppression. We'll elaborate on them next week.

*The Antidotes to the Hindrances (Continued)*

After acknowledging the existence of the hindrance, that it is actually present, interfering with our meditative concentration, we can apply the traditional antidotes. The first of these is to consider the consequences of allowing the hindrance to continue unchecked. What if we simply do nothing and allow the tendency to distraction, to hatred or to doubt to remain? Clearly, it would increase and our character would become progressively dominated by that trait. If we reflect on this, the importance of what we're trying to do will become clearer and we'll be more inclined to ignore the hindrance and turn our minds back to what we're concentrating on.

The second antidote is to cultivate the opposite quality. If there is anger cultivate loving-kindness (metta). If there is doubt cultivate confidence. If there is sloth cultivate energy. If there is restlessness, cultivate contentment and peace. If the mind is too tense relax it; if it's too loose sharpen it. So we try and cultivate the opposite quality to the negative mental state that's interfering with our concentration to overcome or neutralise it.

The third is to cultivate a sky-like attitude. Sometimes the more we resist a hindrance the stronger it gets. If the previous two methods don't work, we try the 'sky-like' attitude. We accept that the hindrance has 'got in' and we simply observe it like a cloud in a vast blue sky. In this way we give it some space and allow it to play itself out. By watching it and not getting involved we allow the fantasies, worries, the images to arise and dissolve. Gradually they lose their power and disperse.

Finally there is suppression. We simply push the hindrance out of our minds or 'leap frog' over it back to our concentration.. This is different from repression, which is unconsciously pushing something down into our unconscious. This antidote is a last resort. We are convinced of the pointlessness of playing host to the hindrance and we simply say 'no' and push it aside. It's best used with weak hindrances. With stronger ones, even if we suppress them, we eventually have to come back and deal with them.

2000

*Seeing Things As They Are*

Traditionally Insight and Enlightenment have been described simply as seeing things as they are! The implication being that we don't perceive things as they are. As the result of a mixture of physiological and socialisation factors we 'construct' the world we perceive from an early age. For example, at the physiological level, we have two eyes at the front of our heads and so binocular vision is 'hard-wired' into us and as a result we can see three dimensionally. Through socialisation we are taught to label and thus separate things with names like 'me', 'you', 'table', 'chair', and so on.
The end result is that we perceive a world of seemingly separate phenomena spread out in space. We perceive ourselves as one object separate and apart from all the others. Furthermore we 'essentialise' things - we attribute permanent essences or a sense of solidity to the perceived phenomena. Finally, subjectively, we prefer certain things to others. Some give rise to pleasant sensations when we perceive them, others unpleasant repulsion, and others still neutral feelings.

Now in reality nothing is, as it seems. As modern ecology demonstrates, nothing exists independently of anything else. We cannot be separated from the air we breathe the water we drink or the food we eat. If we are for too long we actually go out of existence. We can't be separated even from other people. We depend on them for psychological support and guidance. Our education, our personalities and our self-image are all derived from our interactions with other people. Modern physics also demonstrates that far from being a world of solid objects it's all just a constant, dynamic, interactive flux of energy and matter.

The views of modern physics and ecology are congruent with those of ancient Buddhism. According to the latter, nothing is permanent and nothing is separate from anything else. All there is in Reality is impermanence and interrelationship. Moreover, nothing is actually better (in the subjective sense) than anything else, just different. But we try and live in the other world that we have constructed thinking we are separate and independent like other objects and pursuing the ones we like and trying to avoid the ones we don't and hoping for permanence in all our activities. As a consequence, because we have mis-matched Reality and the perceived world, according to Buddhism, we suffer - that's Reality. More next week.

**The Three Characteristics of Conditioned Existence**

The real world of phenomenon, of which we are a part, is a conditioned world according to Buddhism. As we saw last week, modern ecology agrees in demonstrating that nothing exists independently of a set of conditions (eg., nutrients, air and water). These conditions ultimately link everything in the natural world together. According to the Teaching (Dharma) of the Buddha this conditioned existence has three characteristics (laksana): unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), impermanence (anicca) and insubstantiality (anatta).

Let's deal with them in reverse order because the second and third explain the first. Insubstantiality follows on from what we've just been saying. It means that in so far as no thing (nothing) or phenomenon can exist independently of anything else it has no separate, unchanging, inherent quality. Nothing is discrete in the sense of having an independently existing, self-subsistent, inner essence. Everything (including us) arises in dependence on a network of interconnected conditions. When these conditions cease the phenomenon ceases. It is all a process in space, if you like.

Impermanence is like the process of conditionality in time. Things/phenomena arise in dependence on conditions, exist for awhile, and then cease when the
supporting conditions cease. Nothing lasts forever independent of this process of conditionality through time. According to the Buddha, human beings are no different; they do not have a permanent, everlasting 'soul' at the core of their being. They are simply an impermanent and insubstantial flux of mental and physical conditions arising and ceasing. Self-conscious awareness of these processes (which is also a process) deludes us into thinking we have some permanent essence at the centre of our being.

As we saw last week, we try and secure the self we are conscious of by clinging onto what we perceive as the pleasant and repelling the unpleasant. And we don't want to die; we'd rather last forever (or at least a bit longer). But because of impermanence everything pleasant we cling to doesn't last, and we can't forever avoid what we perceive as unpleasant or threatening. Also there is ultimately nothing solid or substantial that we can cling onto. And so we suffer, which is the third characteristic of conditioned existence. Conditioned existence, by its very nature (impermanent and insubstantial), can't provide lasting happiness, and so is inherently unsatisfactory in that sense. But that doesn't mean, according to Buddhism, that there is nothing, just annihilation at the end of life. More next week.

**The Gaining of Insight**

As we have seen the purpose of meditation is to learn to concentrate so that we can see things as they are. The world we perceive as reality is an illusion because we see it as consisting of separate fragments, whereas (in Reality) it is all interconnected. Furthermore, there is a subjective distortion overlaid on this perception, which is our seeing of the world as divided into pleasant things and unpleasant things. Another person may see what you perceive as pleasant or unpleasant as entirely different; it is subjective in that sense.

In meditation we go beyond our normal ego-centric form of consciousness by becoming absorbed in the object of meditation. In going beyond the normal self-centred, subjective way of perceiving things we have the opportunity to see things more as they are. In this way Insight may be gained. We can see that conditioned existence has three characteristics (laksana) mentioned last week: unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), impermanence (anicca) and insubstantiality (anatta). We see through our clear perception that all conditioned or worldly things by their very nature cannot give permanent and lasting satisfaction. For that we've got to look elsewhere! We also see that all worldly things are impermanent; we can't possess any of them forever. Also all conditioned things are insubstantial, only having relative existence. They have no absolute, independent existence. Now contemplation of these three characteristics can give Insight into Nirvana, the Unconditioned. Thus they're also known as the three gateways or entrances to liberation (vimoksa-mukha).

Penetrating unsatisfactoriness one gains knowledge that is Unbiased (apranihita) or objective if you like. Things are not perceived on the subjective bases of greed and aversion, but simply as they are. Fathoming impermanence and emerging as it were on the other side one gains knowledge of the Unconditioned as Imageless
or Signless (animitta). This means that nothing can be frozen and delineated by words, labels or concepts. Plumbing insubstantiality leads to knowledge of the Emptiness or Voidness (sunyata) of all things. Though the three characteristics are ultimately inseparable, one can begin by concentrating on any one of them.

_Nirvana - The Unconditioned_  
The conditioned world is known in Buddhism as Samsara. As we have seen it has the characteristics of unsatisfactoriness, impermanence and insubstantiality. As conditioned beings ourselves we can never find lasting happiness as we try and inflict our subjective view of the world on this shifting mass of conditions in an attempt to secure ourselves. The goal of Buddhism is, however, to achieve lasting happiness and this is to be found in Nirvana.

Samsara is, according to the technical terminology of the Dharma, 'put together' or 'compounded'; which are expressions of the fact that ordinary existence is the result of conditions. With the cessation of these conditions the phenomena they support cease. So things come into existence or have a birth, live, and then cease or die. The Wheel of Life, which we travel around in dependence on these conditions, is often depicted in Buddhism as being in the jaws of the Lord of Death. This is because it involves a never-ending cycle of birth, life and death. Nirvana is therefore described variously as the 'not put together', 'uncompounded', unconditioned and 'the deathless'! But Nirvana or Enlightenment is not something completely or absolutely separate or distinct from Samsara. In fact it is stated in the teaching that Nirvana is in Samsara and Samsara in Nirvana! Buddhism is not about, as mistakenly assumed in many circles, some sort of search for and re-acquaintance with an absolute, Universal Consciousness. That is far too abstract and vague.

It is about finding the unconditioned right in the midst of the conditioned. It doesn't exist anywhere else. In the words of the Heart Sutra Form is no other than Emptiness, Emptiness no other than Form; Form is only Emptiness, Emptiness only Form. Just as, according to Chinese Buddhism, one can only delineate fingers as solid forms because of the spaces between them and the spaces as such because of the co-existing forms of the fingers; one can't have the conditioned without the Unconditioned. So Nirvana in Buddhism is no further away than within your own, everyday, conditioned mind.

_Buddhism and Sustaining the Self_  
The word 'sustainable' is very fashionable these days-it basically means to maintain or to make last. It may seem strange that Buddhism could be interested in building a sustainable self. People often think of it as being about going beyond the self, or even destroying the self (in the sense of the ego). But actually it's very much about building and becoming a healthy, sane self as well. Yes, Buddhism is in many ways about self-transcendence-but how can you transcend yourself if you're not a self in the first place?

More to the point, in terms of recent articles, there are a lot of unsustainable selves around these days. People are confused, uncertain, depressed and
suicidal. Australia along with countries like the UK and USA vie year in and year out for the highest youth suicide rates in the world. And this is occurring in the industrialised, late capitalist, so-called, 'more developed' countries. Along with other symptoms it indicates that all is not well in our societies in their current form.

To commit suicide is the opposite of sustaining the self! The reasons for it amongst the young (and old) are of course complex. The issue of inner impoverishment mentioned in the last couple of articles is undoubtedly one of the factors involved. We've spoken of how a materialistic, consumerist society encourages an external form of pleasure-seeking, which in turn leads to a neglect of the inner world. Sooner or later the pleasure seeking becomes stale and leads nowhere. When it does people have nothing to fall back on, nothing inside to sustain themselves. In such an externally orientated society we have lost the skills of how to enter within ourselves, to communicate within and to engage within. We aren't trained in developing a positive, fulfilled 'inner' sense of self.

This need not be the case. The Buddhist Teaching (Buddha Dharma), for example, is very practical about this issue. In many ways Buddhism is a form of training or education that shows you how to enter within and build a very positive, stable home capable of withstanding all the fluctuating and insecure currents that break against us in this (or any other) period of uncertain times. More on this issue next week.

2001

Buddhism and Society

The teachings of Buddhism have always been applicable to society at large as well as the individual. You can't ever really fully separate the individual out from society, so you can't talk about individual growth without taking into account the state of the society. The historical Buddha himself had much to say on these matters and was what we would call today a social reformer.

Just as the ultimate aim for the individual in Buddhism is to seek enlightenment, so too Buddhist social policy (if we can call it that) is centred around creating societies that foster spiritual development. This is the bottom line; this is where society should be heading. This may sound overly idealistic but I would argue that it is not. In fact, I would say that to have such an aim is realistic because it equates with what, perhaps at a pretty deep level, people really want, and need. The institutions of government and policy ignore this at their own peril. It is dangerous for them to do this because human nature will rebel if their needs aren't met!

So the ultimate aim is to create a society that helps spiritual growth, or at least recognises this as a core value of society. Moving back from this ultimate ideal, an 'enlightened' society at least recognises the importance of facilitating the psychological and cultural growth of its citizens. However, it is no use talking about these lofty ideals if people's basic needs of water, food, clothing, shelter,
hygiene, health, education and meaningful work are not being met. There is a hierarchy of people's needs and you can't satisfy the higher ones when and if the basic ones are not being met. This is where Buddhism starts.

When we examine current political and social policies in Australia (and in many other so called 'developed countries') we have to say that from a Buddhist perspective they are sadly lacking. They certainly lack an ideal vision for the society for a start. Also I think it's fairly safe to say that they have become overwhelmingly and unhealthily obsessed with economic matters. They emphasise and concentrate on matters solely that pertain to the 'economy' - that abstract entity that no one, from leading economists to politicians, really understands anymore - and neglect the more concrete, basic needs of human beings. People, citizens, the electorate (being human beings) will not put up with this. The signs are everywhere that they are indeed very 'fed up' with the current economic obsession.

**Buddhist Social Policy**

In the last article we introduced the idea that Buddhism has a social perspective as well as a spiritual one. In fact you can never really separate these two aspects from each other. We pointed out that the focal point, therefore, of a Buddhist social policy is to try and create social conditions that foster Enlightenment or at least spiritual development. However, it is recognised that people's more basic (survival) needs have to be met as a necessary condition before spiritual development can be a realistic goal.

The trouble with the overwhelming orientation towards economic policy that seems an 'obsession' of contemporary government policy is that it doesn't recognise these broader needs of human beings. Karl Polyani in his book *The Great Transformation* (published in the 1940s) pointed out that one of the unfortunate by-products of capitalism is that it turns people into mere commodities and resources to be apportioned at the whim of market forces. Prior to the industrial revolution and the advent of capitalism, Polyani claims that earlier European societies were organised more around cooperation and stability (e.g. the guild system).

With the advent of international trade, industrialisation and laissez-faire capitalism in the 17th and 18th centuries, the market place became the dominant forces within society. The European countries and the Americas had to deploy capital and labour into their new industries and market their products through trade to maintain their comparative economic advantages over each other. This is what Polyani meant by *The 'Great Transformation'*. A transformation from a situation where societies were organised to meet human needs on a more cohesive, co-operative basis to one in which competition dictated by market forces was emphasised.

Looking at contemporary society one can only conclude that nothing much has changed. Competition and market forces alone, from a Buddhist perspective, do
not create societies that meet peoples broader human needs, let alone foster their spiritual development.

The Unfamiliar Self
The other night, in the Introducing Buddhism class that is being run at the centre currently, we were discussing the nature of self. We were talking about how people become overwhelmingly identified with their interactions and relations with things in the 'outside' world. Things like possessions, belongings, fashions, friends, groups, beliefs, roles, qualifications, status, our profession or job, and so on. We use these external orientations or interactions to define ourselves, in fact, to define our identity.

Furthermore, we use their qualities or characteristics to distinguish us from others, to set ourselves apart. Creating our identity also involves actively 'identifying' with these things; that is, equating our 'self' with their qualities. To put it simply, we use these external relations to give our self an identity, and then 'identifying' with the identity becomes a powerful way of creating and maintaining that sense of self.

But aren't we 'inside' too? Isn't there an inside world too and where is our self there? Here I think we become less certain, less sure of our ground. We know the external dimension of ourselves quite well because we identify so completely with them they're more familiar. But trying to define or describe ourselves from the inside is a lot less familiar. The situation has been likened to trying to describe a hole in a piece of wood. The easiest way is to describe it in terms of the colour, texture and shape of the wood that surrounds it "it is a brown, round, smooth hole". The hole's identity (so to speak) is derived in this way from the wood around it. But is this really the hole? The hole is actually just empty space!

So it is with our self. Is the self really all those external things we identify with? Or is it what is inside of them? How familiar is that to us? We all agreed in our chat at the centre that the inside part of ourselves was not very familiar to us and like anything unfamiliar perhaps a bit frightening! In some ways it is like a hole a sort of emptiness or space or even a vacuum. How easy it is for our consumer-driven economy and society to play on this and drag us along with it as we fall prey to all the advertising, because we identify with it. Less so if we are quite comfortably at home or resident within. The Chinese have a saying: "Are you a guest in your own house; or are you the host?"

How We Create Our Self
As well as maintaining our 'self' by identifying with our external relationships with things possessions, professions, friends, fashions, beliefs and so on - we create ourselves from within with our own minds. The human mind is capable of looking into itself or bending back on itself. Technically this ability is known as reflexivity. This term shares its meaning with the more common use of the word 'reflex' describing the process of nerve impulses moving from a stimulus to the central nervous system and then back out to a muscle.
Humans are not just aware, they're aware that they're aware! This is the mind bending back on itself or looking into itself. The awareness of something being aware produces our experience of self-hood - it is in fact self-awareness. Whenever we think, our minds retreat inwardly in a sort of self-referencing arc. We can close our eyes and consciously think about ourselves or analyse ourselves. We can look back into our memories and construct a sense of our past, or we can imagine ourselves in some future situation (try it). This is often called 'reflection', another word that shares its meaning with reflexive.

Actually, our mind is doing this bending back on itself or referring back to itself all the time. You could describe it as a process of self-referencing. This self-referential process is happening continuously and very fast so that it is largely unconscious. We're not aware that we're doing it (unlike when we're consciously reflecting). We're continually remembering our self, imagining our self, thinking about our self, generating feelings about our self, forming attitudes toward our self, and so on. That is why we have expressions like 'positive or negative self-image' or 'low self-esteem'. They refer to personal experiences produced by these self-referencing arcs within our own minds.

In this way, according to Buddhism (and other Eastern traditions), the mind 'manufactures' its sense of self. But actually there is no real self! No self, that is, in the sense of some independently existing entity, outside of this process. There is simply the process of continuous self-referencing, which is happening so fast that it's analogous to a cinematic film. The film actually consists of a great number of single snap shots which when projected onto a screen give the impression of a continuous event. Each of our mind's self-referential arcs is like a snap shot which form a series happening so fast we think that what they're projecting (the experience of a self) is a continuity - a solidly existing and independent entity. But, actually, 'Who am I? The one who asked the question, or the one about whom I asked the question?'

**Simply Happy**

Through the practice of Buddhism it is possible to change from an unhealthy, neurotic, unhappy state to a healthy, happy, human one. Often just to achieve this is the starting point for many people who walk through the doors of a Buddhist centre. Later it's possible to climb past this point and become a 'very' happy human being experiencing an uninterrupted stream of higher levels of consciousness. Actually it's interesting to reflect on this a bit more. There is the suggestion in Buddhism that we accept far too low a level of consciousness as our normal one, and that in fact this low level is not the normal, natural, human state.

Children are often seen to be in a very happy state, and indeed in many traditions it is encouraged to 'become like a child again'. That is not to say that this is a particularly 'spiritual' state because, even though happy, children are often, if not usually, very self-centred. No, what we are talking about here is simply a natural, human state of happiness that is available to all of us. This state is often romanticized, as well, as perhaps typical of earlier humans in the so-
called primal societies. When we talk of happiness in these senses we're usually talking about things like being care-free, spontaneous, taking joy from living in the present, playing, laughing and so on.

The higher states of consciousness accessible through meditation are known as the dhyanas in Buddhism and traditionally there are eight of them. Not only can one experience them through meditation but also you can live in the first one as your normal everyday consciousness. They are spoken of as 'higher' simply because they are happier, more concentrated and more refined than our normal consciousness, which tends to be distracted, emotionally stormy, and prone to craving and aversion.

Non-Existence of Self
At the heart of the Buddha's Enlightenment was his insight into the Law of Conditionality. The fact that every single phenomenon in the universe has evolved through a gigantic network of causes and conditions. Everything we encounter is but a temporary perturbation of energy and matter in a vast web of interconnected conditions stretched out infinitely over time and space. One phenomena depends for its existence on the properties of another phenomena. Everything we encounter can be analysed and reduced to the conditions that produce it, spread out over space and time.

For example, this computer I'm word processing on doesn't work with out the electricity it is using, and that comes from a coal-fired electricity plant, which burns coal that comes from the earth and was formed three hundred thousand years ago by vast geological events in the earth's history. It also comes from the glass and plastic and the human ideas that invented and created this technology, and it doesn't work without human fingers dancing around on the key-board and mouse. Everything in this conditioned world is contingent. Everything we know IS NOTHING in itself; it has no existence apart from the many conditions that make it possible it IS those conditions. Modern physics and ecology says much the same thing as the Buddha said two thousand five hundred years ago.

However, because we have self-consciousness we experience ourselves as separate from everything. As a result we feel incomplete, alone, insecure. But actually we are inseparable from the environment around us. Taken to its extreme implication this means we do not exist as we think we do, that is, we are not a completely independent existing self. In fact the implication is that we, as we normally think of our selves, do not ultimately exist! Deep in our hearts we seem to know this but we repress it and crave to be. So on the one hand we feel separate and incomplete, on the other, we know we're not separate and therefore don't ultimately exist. The result is a very deep sense of existential anxiety and discomfort that fuels a quest for security. As Shakespeare said: "To be or not to be, that is the question."
Fixed Self-View

We usually have a fixed view of ourselves in the West. Quite often it's a negative one, such as, that I am bad, no good, stupid and won't ever be able to change. It's interesting to reflect upon where in our culture this negativity springs from, this problem with appreciating ourselves. We even have a saying about it that an old dog can't change its spots. The following words from Buddhaghosa, one of the earliest Buddhist sages after the Buddha, put quite a different slant on it: "No doer of the deed may be found; No one who ever reaps their fruit; Just bare phenomena roll on, Dependent upon conditions all."

This is the idea that we are not fixed, that instead we are an ever-changing flux of conditions mental, physical, biological and chemical. The fixed view of the self is just mental phenomena and if we ever stop to observe our minds we discover that those phenomena are just changing all the time minute to minute and day to day. They are certainly not fixed. They change in dependence upon conditions and are thus impermanent. Just like all conditioned phenomena in the world.

We can use this fact to help us. If we set up the right conditions it will change our mental states, for example, from negative to positive ones. Instead of a fixed view of yourself you can develop a more fluid one, such as, that you can make of yourself whatever you want by putting the right conditions in place. Some of the best conditions you can build into your lifestyle from a Buddhist viewpoint are the practice of ethics, daily meditation and study.

Contacting Our Emotions

To manage ourselves skilfully it's important to know how we're reacting emotionally to events and circumstances. However, in the West we tend to be not very good at this. A popular book published not long ago called "Emotional Intelligence" was all about this. About how intellectual intelligence is not the only component of intelligence and how important it is to educate the young from an early age in developing emotional intelligence. Buddhism has always seen intelligence to be a combination of reason and emotion a combination of intelligent feelings and 'feeling-full' intelligence.

One of the ways into our emotions is to acknowledge the basic feeling of pleasure and pain when they arise. These are strong, simple signals that are often ignored or covered up. But it's important to 'own' them because they are the originating point of emotional reactions.

You can make it a practice to ask yourself throughout the day whether you are enjoying this experience or not, whether you feel something or not. And if you can feel something is it a pleasant feeling or a painful feeling?

This is a very good habit to get into and it will develop emotional accuracy, truthfulness and mindfulness. If you're truthful with yourself about how you feel, then you'll become more clear-minded and self-confident. You'll not be pretending that you're enjoying something when you are not, or convincing
yourself that some experience will be unpleasant when you know that you'll enjoy it. If you don't pretend, you give yourself more freedom of choice in your emotional reactions.

**Going Deeper into Emotions**

Last week we talked about being able to contact our emotions by being aware of the primary feelings of pleasure and pain. One of the ways into our emotions is to acknowledge the basic feelings of pleasure and pain when they arise. Another way to get into them, is not so much to label and analyse them, but to 'experience' them directly. Initially it may be useful to label them, but to really get into them it's best to drop any attempt at analysing them along the lines of "what type of emotion is this that I'm feeling?" Try and communicate with them using a different language to that of the conceptual or intellectual. Use sensory language. Try asking yourself what colour they are, what temperature, texture, even what sound and smell they have? Are they hot or cold, smooth or rough that sort of thing. Really try to "feel" them; what do they feel like, what shape and where in the body. Get a felt sense of them and stay with the felt sense for a while. As with meditation as your self-awareness goes deeper and deeper into them they can begin to change. Eventually you can experience them as raw energy and you can 'unhook' them from whichever part of your personality they're stuck with. This way they can be transformed. The raw energy of depression can be changed into a warm, compassionate feeling for yourself. Great anger can be transformed into great love. This is the wonderful thing about self-awareness, it's like bringing heat to water, which changes it from liquid to a gas. It's a transforming agent. Next time you're in a mood try and sit with it, go into it and explore it and let it 'be'. Then after awhile it will have 'been' and you'll feel different.

**Unconditional Being**

There are many schools of Buddhism in the West these days. In a way the western cultures have become heirs to the whole tradition because never before in the past were all the schools present in one country or culture. It seems to me that whether they are vipassana (insight), Zen, Tibetan, Hinayana or Mahayana schools of Buddhism they all seem to be emphasising some common themes as they adapt to the West.

One of these is that if through the practice of meditation and mindfulness we can break through or break out of our fixed, confined, mechanical mind we experience a state of unconditional being. Our mechanical mind is reactive in the sense that it reacts with pleasure or pain, attraction or repulsion to whatever it encounters. Through mindfulness practice we learn to just watch these reactions and not get caught up in them. We create spaciousness in our mind in which these impulses-to-act just die out like aircraft vapour trails in the sky. This way we get to know ourselves in greater detail.

Also through meditation we become more and more familiar with this fundamental quality of spaciousness within our mind. Sometimes it is described as a basic sanity or our potential Buddha-nature within. It's the region of our
creative potential that can allow us to respond rather than react to events. It has nourishing qualities of freshness, openness, and goodness. It's beyond our normal, limited egoistic view of ourselves, which we struggle so hard to maintain through desire and aversion. Because it is unfamiliar territory and beyond our normal sense of self it takes patience and courage to learn to dwell in it. When we can, we discover a bravery within that potentially exists within everyone without exception. It is our unconditional, pure being and it is where Nirvana lives.

To Be or Not To Be
We do not exist as separate entities. We are not disconnected to everything else. This is the topic we have been wrestling with this week in our Introducing Buddhism course. As I'm sure you are aware there are certain conditions that we depend on for our existence and without them we'd cease to exist - air, water and food to name three of the most basic. We are completely immersed in or enmeshed with our environment; without its inputs into our biological system we wouldn't exist. If we leave this planet we have to take an artificial environment with us to survive.

So in this sense there is no self separate from everything else. Yet we have a very definite experience of self and part of that experience is that we are separate from other things. What a puzzling position to be in. The Buddhist teaching on self that describes this paradoxical situation is that we as self neither exist nor do not exist. In other words ultimately we do not exist as something disconnected and completely separate and self-sustaining; and yet we do exist as a self that is thrown up by various conditions. Our existence as self is contingent on these conditions.

The principal condition is that our brains are capable of reflexive consciousness a consciousness that can bend back on itself and be aware that it is being aware. It is this continuous awareness of something being aware that gives us the sense or feeling of being a self. But actually it is just a continuous process like a series of snap shots strung together that give the illusion of solid reality just as a film does. When the film is playing we see what looks like solid independently existing entities. But when we stop the film and look at the reel we find that it consists of a whole lot of single photographs.

This sense of self from a Buddhist point of view is very important. Without it we would not have autonomy and the ability to make choices, like choosing to grow and meditate. But we don't take it too seriously. We accept that the experience of separation it bestows on us is apparent not real. Meditation reveals to us how the self has no real substance and makes it transparent. We use it to help us manage life but we don't take it to be the centre of the universe. Meditation also overcomes the sense of separation and reveals something beyond the illusion of self.
Buddhism and the Environment

Last Sunday we had a stall at the World Environment Day celebration at Powell Park so I thought I'd say a few words about Buddhism in relation to the Environment. I've seen Buddhism referred to as 'spiritual ecology' in the literature on Buddhism and the Environment what does this mean? Well, ecology studies organisms and their relationship with the environment, in contrast to biology, which tends to study organisms in isolation. What ecology reveals in its study is that everything is interconnected with everything else and knit together by a complex web of conditions and causal chains occurring on the biological, physical and chemical planes.

Buddhism has always accepted that all phenomena are interconnected and mutually conditioning. However, it considers that this occurs not only at the material level but at the immaterial level as well. In other words at the level of the psychological, volitional and spiritual as well as the physical, chemical and biological. Thus, just as the biophysical environment for example, the landscape, the weather can affect human mental states, human mental states can also effect the environment. The three poisons of greed, aggression and delusion operating in the collective human mind can actually manifest as poisons or pollution in the biophysical environment. This is one way Buddhism can be interpreted as 'spiritual ecology' it factors the human being into an intimate cause and effect relationship with the environment. So the Laws of Conditioned Co-production and Karma (that actions have consequences) are very relevant to the analysis of environmental issues and problems and their relation to human ethics.

The Three Poisons

Currently, we are taking a closer look at the negative human tendencies towards greed, aggression and ignorance or delusion. In Buddhism, these are known as the Three Poisons. We have looked at ways in which we can counter greed by developing our capacity for generosity. Today we shall focus on the tendency to aggression, aversion or hatred.

What is hatred? As Subhuti says, in The Buddhist Vision, human hatred may range from senseless acts of cruelty against completely innocent people to being no more than a mild dislike and a frosty manner. We hate what we feel threatens or undermines our sense of self. We go far beyond our instinct for self-preservation by vigorously defending a weak ego. While aggression may be vented on objects, it is almost always directed at people.

At one end of the scale, hatred may take us by surprise, as when someone 'cracks up' over a seemingly small thing like being kept waiting. We may have a persistent feeling of irritability or sense of being wronged, which shows itself in a carping, 'picky' attitude towards others. At the other end of the scale, our sense of 'I' may feel so under threat that we want other people removed or even for them to be destroyed entirely. Aggression at any level ultimately, brings unhappiness for both perpetrator and victim.
So how can we counter our hatred? Hatred is displaced by love. In the Buddhist context, the Pali word metta is best used to describe 'love', being an intense desire for the welfare of others, which is acted upon. Metta can be actively cultivated through the meditation practice of metta bhavana. We can develop a more kindly attitude towards ourselves, systematically work upon our relationships and develop a friendly attitude towards others. By encouraging positive emotion through meditation and by ethical behaviour, we can develop our antidote to the poison of aggression.

Field notes
6 April 2005
• Met Quinn at the Buddhist Centre at 3.15pm after rushing from the bed and breakfast. Parked in front
• Knocked and Quinn came to the door (it had looked empty)
• Quinn was a fairly large, tall Australian – looked typical Aussie, casual manners. He spoke rather quickly and was quick to be friendly.
• He showed me around the basic centre and it rooms.
• Quinn learnt Tai Chi in England and he showed me his Chinese teacher who was a lineage of great master – he claimed that he learnt the original stuff.
• Offered me some tea which I accepted – he made 2 cups. Offered biscuits that I declined.
• We then went straight into the interview process in the meditation rooms – we dragged some chairs and I placed the iRiver recorder on the third chair. I was rushed and turned on the recorder before asking his permission but immediately realised it and received his permission.
• Quinn had no problems except the participant observation – I assured him that this was all in good faith (not to pick on inconsistencies or make judgement) but rather to help explain behaviour and beliefs.

The interview
• Quinn kept talking about his theories and also what other teachers told him, and about the experience of others. I assume that this was because he was an academic and a teacher – he like to play with and teach concepts. He enjoyed it and wanted to talk about it. I felt that after a while this was a little not to the point. However, after about half way through I began to feel that the things he was describing, most of these were his views, his feeling (at least he shared these) – in fact he was describing himself and his beliefs through the views and beliefs of others. I then felt that this was more useful or pertinent. However, I had to try to keep him from going to far of track or into academia or too theoretical. I wanted his views and his life not theories.
• Nevertheless, I felt the interview was compelling
• The interview was also very refreshing: here was a very typical friendly Aussie leading a Aussie lifestyle trying his best at practicing Buddhism. Although he was in academia, he was a typical (perhaps) Aussie one – down to earth like all other Aussies (he could have been a plumber with his demeanour) except I think academia tend to be more theoretical (they like to intellectualise things a bit more).
• Overall, he was a nice guy, that was quick and I felt that he did not have a long attention span e.g. several times when talked during the interview and I often struggled today to find the right words, he eyes would wonder – he enjoyed quickness and brevity of exchanges I felt. I generally felt hurried most of the time with him, though it was not unpleasant (hurriedness had been a factor since not finding that bed and breakfast!).

• Quinn was brought up as strict Irish Catholic – and he quickly mentioned this. He was not too fond of his Christian past which he found depressive.

Leaving

• He told me he enjoyed the interview and was happy to meet up again. He was also keen to explore further the idea of extending Buddhist practice to the environment. I told him that while I believe that this is important, I am now emphasising the interface between the inner ecology and outer ecology. He was very interested and I asked him to further reflect how inner and outer actually was related - was not easy topic but he agreed.

• I told him I would summarise our meeting and email – he was keen on this idea.

• We bid farewell as he prepared to teach students Tai Chi. Shook hands for the second time. He was in a good mood. I think it was a good interview session for him and that he found things that he hadn’t thought of before and it had and was still engaging his critical faculties (and this he enjoyed and continue to savour).

• I drove back to see Amy (who was angry to have waited 3 hours!)
KACY

Interview

Part 1 (17 March 2005)

Interviewer: When did you start practicing Buddhism?

Kacy: You mean really practicing?

Interviewer: Yes.

Kacy: It was a sudden moment ... for me it was.

Interviewer: OK.

Kacy: But before the sudden moment, probably in my mid thirties I started intellectual exploration of dharma reading lots of books and stuff but you don’t really practice, just read about it. Then at one time I went on a trip to Ladakh with a friend which is in India and I had some experiences that I saw things that I recognised some images and things like that … that I thought I’d seen before … mandalas and things like that that you just look at and go, “Ah!” But I just remembered that that was a really strong experience. But I didn’t really ... the time I really got involved full on was in 1992 His Holiness Dalai Lama came to Australia and 2 years before that I was asked to help with the organising committee for His Holiness’s tour. I wasn't a Buddhist at the time but they thought I might be able to help because of my communications skills and media skills. So I said that I’d help because he just got the Nobel Peace Prize a couple of years before that. I'll give a hand because he's a really good guy. So for 2 years I was involved in the organising committee where I worked with Buddhists, proper Tibetan Australian Buddhists, people who were really committed including one person who was an Australian monk. So working around them I got a bit influenced. It rubbed off even though there was a lot of politics going on and infighting and all the rest of it. I thought that there might be something in it. But the real moment came in Tinvale when His Holiness arrived. I was running a press conference and he was late. I had all the TV crews and radio people and they were hanging about and being stroppy because he was late. So I was trying to keep people happy. Now I had never met him before and people in the committee were saying, “You just wait until you meet His Holiness! You just wait because it's going to be really special.” And I was saying, “Yeh, yeh, yeh, he’s a good person.” But when His Holiness walked into the room, I just lost it! I just fell to pieces. I was shaking and crying. It was unbelievable! I had to pull myself together really quickly because I had to ... number one, I was photographing as well as keeping other journalists organised and all that stuff ... So I had to pull myself really quickly. It was like I’d ... I’d been hit by a train. It was that strong.
Interviewer: Just by him walking into the room?

Kacy: Just by him walking into the room.

Interviewer: And you looked at him ...

Kacy: I just looked at him and I just burst into tears. It was like uh...phhuum! [loud exploding tone]

Interviewer: What was it that made that happen?

Kacy: It was a recognition. It was a connection, really strong. It was in my body. Like I had been hit by a train. Like those metaphors I was talking about. It was like something took over my body. In the next few days we were busy running around ... public teachings and Buddhist teachings and Lord Mayors and welcome dinners, all that stuff. I was planning the media. And for 2 days we were very busy ... His Holiness had the flu a little bit ... we were in his company even though the police, the police minders, the foreign affairs minister for Tibet ... we had all these minders. So we were getting quite high, you know we talk about the ‘dharma high’ when you meet some real life people. It can happen like that like you’re drugged a bit. And that was happening a bit. We were getting a bit drugged by being around him, being really euphoric as well as getting really busy. And just watching him he was astounding in however he dealt with the people. It was like ... it was like he was so present and for anyone whether it was the policeman who was protecting him or a little kid with some flowers or the Lord Mayor or whatever, he was the same. You know looking into their eyes ... it’s just amazing! As he was about to leave I said to the Minister for Foreign Affairs because we just worked so hard, “Can we have a few minutes private audience with His Holiness?” ... this 12 members in the committee who have worked really hard for 2 years ... for 5 minutes, maybe just get a blessing or something like that ... because the others were too scared to ask. Sure enough he gave us an audience. And this is remarkable ... we were all gathering in a room with the police and the minders just before he was to get on the plane, and he actually gave us half an hour because his schedule is very tight ... public teachings, Tibetan politics etc and 6-7 hours of practice every day, he gets up at 3am everyday to do practice. So we were just in the hotel room and he was just ... he’s actually quite a small person ... and he was just laughing and cracking jokes. He speaks reasonable English with a bad accent. And teasing us and making fun and he then sat us down on a table and he gave us a little teaching about what it means to be an Australian Buddhist. It was really interesting! When we compared notes later with each other we all heard something completely different. Even though he only spoke to us formally for just 7 minutes ... after the jokes and goodbye ... Yes we all heard something completely different.

Interviewer: What was your take?

Kacy: My take was ... I can still hear him still now ... because we were all in quite a heighten sense of being being around him like I said the dharma high. I heard
him say that being an Australian Buddhist was not anything about rituals. It was about working with communities and, for us, it was dharma in practice – practical dharma – not contemplative dharma.

Interviewer: I.e. practicing in community …

Kacy: Yes, go and do your work, rather adhering to the ritualistic side of things. But the other people heard differently. Whether he said something more general and we chose bits out of it or something else happened I don’t know. But it was very, very profound. And this was the turning point for me. Like when we got to the airport and everyone was saying goodbye and he had 2 policemen with him the whole time round, his bodyguards.

Interviewer: Australians?

Kacy: Tough guys and then they’re crying! And you know how he’d present the scarf to say goodbye in the Tibetan tradition and these cops they’ve got their guns here and everything but with tears running down their face. Like even for them they were so struck by his humanity. It was amazing, for me being scientifically trained to have such a metaphysical experience. It was quite unbelievable for me. And it lasted for nearly 4-5 months, really strong and it wasn’t an intellectual sense, it was a whole feeling within my body that because I had met His Holiness I was convinced that there were more people like him on the planet – he wasn’t the only one but he was one, a very important one – and because there were people like him on the planet both now, the past and future times, all things were possible. And it was a feeling I had in my whole body. By what I meant by all things are possible is that we can live in peace, we can look after the environment, that we can be compassionate and we can move beyond harming others. It was the strongest feeling because I felt that there’s this person and there’s an explanation for it.

Interviewer: What does a whole body experience mean?

Kacy: It’s more like ... the difference is ... because now I feel it here – it’s an intellectual feeling, and when I talk to you it’s from an intellectual point of view. Then it was an absolute certainty. You know it’s like when you have as a child and you are living in all your senses. It was something beyond words. It was like a knowing – it was what they call a realisation. You know how we all have in our dharma development we have these mini-realisations and then you get a big one when you break through and see emptiness and a whole lot more big ones going on. But this was a mini one [clicking of fingers].

Interviewer: So that was the start of your real practice in Buddhism.


Interviewer: Since then, what have you been doing in terms of practice? Maybe you can describe?
Because of that Tibetan tradition which explains past lives and that sort of things and there is a strong community here and a teaching community here ... so I started going to teachings. In Tibetan tradition there is strong emphasis not only on meditation but on intellectual training and so on – the wisdom along with the meditation. And because the way we’ve been trained that’s easier to do than sitting on you bloody cushion. So I’ve studied a lot more weekend teachings and occasional weeklong retreats and trying to do my practice as best as I could. I have to say though that my practice is very up and down like my formal sitting practice.

Interviewer: What are the practices in Tibetan Buddhism?

Kacy: They have thousands of practices in the Tibetan traditions. All geared at your particular propensity or what’s going to work for you. I’ve done a little bit of training in tantric practices, a fair bit of study in sutra practices and that’s work it basically comes down to for me – I tend to leave the tantric stuff alone.

Interviewer: So do you do mainly sutra practice?

Kacy: Yes though I do use with some of the tantric practices that I’ve been initiated in – because you have to have direct transmission from teacher – I do you use mantra a lot in terms of concentration stilling of the mind.

Interviewer: And what is the mantra you use?

Kacy: The one I use the most is the Chenrezig Avalokitesvara mantra ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’.

Interviewer: So they repeat ... there is repetition?

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: And do you do it anytime?

Kacy: Yes, anytime and at the time you’re repeating it you’re all visualising that they say that ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ encapsulate in it the whole of the Buddhist path. So it represents the whole Buddhist path. It is also the mantra of Chenrezig who is the emanation of compassion. So it’s the way of devoting compassion. So this works at a number of levels: Harmonic – these are very ancient words; you concentrating so there’s that bit; and you’re also trying to evoke this feeling of compassion while you’re concentrating. That one I use a lot e.g. when I’m driving, I use it a lot when I’m swimming like in walking meditation but I do it while swimming, because you can ratchet off your breath in each full breath of swimming. The other one I use is the mantra of Sakayamuni Buddha – I don’t use it a lot. The other one I use when I get a bit anxious ... because I went through a bit of a bad time during menopause ... and this one is a Buddha emanation, Tara. She, one of only a few she’s in a very patriarchal religion, is a
manifestation of our Buddha-nature concerning compassion in action. She is depicted as springing into action to help other people. But Tara is not somebody else; Tara is an aspect of ourselves.

Interviewer: Do these deities exist or are they a manifestation, a representation, of our virtues?

Kacy: Both. All those who have become Buddha, have realised enlightenment are active in the universe helping. So Tara would be an aspect of those, if you know what I mean. When you say the mantra for Tara which is ‘Om tare tuttare ture svaha’ you’re actually trying to evoke compassion in action usually for yourself if you are a bit frightened or stuff like that and it’s very calming because you are at the same time imagining all the compassionate beings in the universe helping you, and that you can become one of them and help others.

Interviewer: So would you use that when you are stressed or fearful?

Kacy: Yes. But that’s a really, really, really, really, really, really baby tantric stuff that I do. That’s all I’m capable of. Other practices include sitting practice beginning with mindfulness of breath. First begins with stilling practice to settle yourself down and then go on to mindfulness of breath. Every time you go off with the fairies just come back. Sometimes that’s all I can do because my mind is a very agitated. When the mind drifts you do a bit of noting, we just say, ‘thinking’ or ‘worrying’ or ‘planning’ – so name it and then come back. Sometimes if you don’t name it it will just keep spinning off, and you come back. Sometimes I can just settle a little bit and then just stay but not very often: My mind is a very agitated mind. So often it’s watching breath, watching breath and watching breath. Then I finish with visualisation and I visualise His Holiness because it is very strong image because I’ve had that direct experience, as you know. I visualise him and his compassionate nature and I actually absorb that into my own heart and so it gets really big. And then I make my heart big and it fills my whole body with compassion and then I think about those close to me. So it is a loving-kindness meditation.

Interviewer: Do you then feel the compassion going out?

Kacy: Yes. Like his heart now fills my whole body and its golden light comes out to them. Then I think about someone who I’m having difficulties with which there is always is somebody that I’m working with or whatever.

Interviewer: ... that you have difficulties with?

Kacy: Yes ... because you might spin off while you’re cranky with them. You have to keep coming back and say that it’s not the point to put them back here and say, “You hear me! [irate tone].” So you have to come back each time. Sometimes I have to go right back to His Holiness once again, and then go through the whole thing to get the feeling back.
Interviewer: You have to be in a mindful, steady state to be able to do that and not be attached to that nasty person.

Kacy: But sometimes you just spin off and get cranky with them and so you have to come back and get the compassion again. Sometime I can do it for only 1 second before I ... but I reckon 1 second is OK! [laugh]. Then I finish off with sending it out to all the people who are afraid in the world or crying in some building in the world because they are being bombarded by mortars ... from the Israelis or something like that.

Interviewer: Is there an earlier stage where you have compassion for yourself?

Kacy: Very much so. From my understanding of Theravada and vipassana it’s what they call metta and you do a lot of training of that normally.

Interviewer: Do you find it easy or difficult to do this?

Kacy: Easy. Because most people in the West have come to Buddhism because of great pain or something dramatic happening in their lives. It’s not culturally brought along with. Something happens to that they have to go off and find it, and you have to actually go of and find Buddhism. It’s not around you.

Interviewer: For you did it happen that way?

Kacy: Yes it did a bit, things earlier in life about injustices, things that made me intellectually enquiring about.

Interviewer: But was there something painful or nasty that happened?

Kacy: Yes. Yes. When you scratch the surface of a lot of Western Buddhists, there’s something there that’s happened ... something that they feel they need to get a bit of a grip on or explanation or something that shocked them so much that they want a different way of looking at the world. I’d have to say three quarters of the Buddhists I’ve known have had something like that.

Interviewer: For you, is that experience too private to share?

Kacy: No.

Interviewer: What was it that you were at pain with that you had to seek a spiritual tradition like Buddhism?

Kacy: In my mid twenties, I was physically attacked over a long ... and held captive. You know it was a sexual assault by a trusted person. And then it went to the court, and the court made minced meat out of me ... basically like they tend to do. And so there a was whole load of questionings about ... about why things happen ... about justice, not just justice from the legal point of view but how we live with our actions. Through that processes with the court, I got to meet
a whole lot of women who had been having equal difficulties in the courts, and just their stories were amazing in terms of ... again, the same kinds of things: why did it happen to people, human resilience, just some of those kind of big questions. When I look at it now, it was about me trying to come to some kind of grip with what we call ‘karma.’ And now we have a little bit of a model from the Buddhist training that you could hang your mind on. It makes it much easier to understand or to bear even! You can say, “OK, these events happened obviously because I treated other people badly in the past. I was just as much a creator of this situation than just blaming that other person.” This is the explanation that I have now through my Diamond Sutra training of these events. Through what has actually happened there, in some way, I’ve actually come to a much greater understanding about things and I have become myself a more compassionate person, because I’ve had to deal with other people through this. But back then I didn’t know that ... it was like all this stuff was spinning around but then when I met some people in the dharma and I started talking and I started studying and I sort of got a different pictures of things.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that rather private experience. I don’t think I could fully comprehend but I share your pain.

Kacy: Yes ... so again that is a kind of enquiry I think. But I still really think now though, when you look back, that you get led – it is again this karmic link and past connections – you get led to where you need to be either through where you’ve been in the past or whatever ... why you’re a Thai Buddhist and I end up with a bunch of mad Tibetans! And I live in Australia.

Interviewer: It’s our karma.

Kacy: And it is the fact that we have relationships that are beyond this time, you know ...

Interviewer: So now do you try and practice everyday?

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: For how long?

Kacy: At least 40 minutes and then because I exercise a fair bit and try and do - whenever I’m walking on the beach or swimming in the pool – I try and do my mantra, which is again concentration exercise.

Interviewer: So it’s ongoing whenever you’re not lazy.

Kacy: I have a lot of things to help me because I forget all the time. There are some of the things that remind me [in a notebook she brings]: ‘Marvellous this life and time,’ so stop worrying about some client or paying the bill and I go wow isn’t this amazing out here. ‘Altruistic motivations is truth’ and here’s another one
'Check attachments’ and ‘Check motivation’ – why am I really doing this? Is it because I’m trying to vindicate myself or ...

Interviewer: You’ve done this for 13 years?

Kacy: On and off [laughs].

Part 2 (17 March 2005)

After a coffee break Kacy comes back and continues explaining some of the concepts in the reminder notes.

Kacy: I try to check my motivations: Why am I here? Who am I trying to benefit?

Interviewer: So your motivations as in your immediate goals and then longer term goals?

Kacy: My motivations for actually being there, to remind myself that I am here to be of service to these people. I am here to be truthful. I am here to give them my best ... And sort of remind myself before I walk through the door.

Interviewer: Did dharma help that?

Kacy: Yes that is dharma. That for me is dharma in practice. Sure enough you are doing this to earn your living but it’s got to be more than this. You’re doing this to be of service and help others.

Interviewer: That was 13 years ago when you started practicing. Before that were you a regular Australian and brought up as a Christian?

Kacy: My mother brought me up as Christian but father brought me up as a questioning atheist – so I had the two polarities. Like for example I’d come back from Sunday school and that was a really big deal because we live in the country and it was a really social thing. So sitting at the table having Sunday lunch and my father would say, “What did you do at Sunday school today,” and I’d say, “We did about the bit about Jesus and how he turned water into wine. Really fantastic.” And my father would say, “Alright let’s think about this. Let’s think about how that might be possible. Do you think that was a real event or a metaphor for something.” So my father was trying to get me to question stuff and just try to think that maybe it’s not just a story and there’s another meaning, and maybe it’s not the literal truth. That kind of stuff. So yes I had a bit of a split childhood.

Interviewer: When you encountered Buddhism and started practicing, did your life change?

Kacy: My life changed because I started hanging around with more Buddhists ... very strongly.
Interview: Did you have different company straight away?

Kacy: Yes, straight away. You talk about dharma a lot more and go to teachings which very important in the Tibetan tradition. Also I’d always had a bit of an ecofascism tendency from my environmental training. That was based a little bit on the eco-guilt thing. So I shifted it from eco-guilt to eco-responsibility. The guilt thing can be quite strong in the West about how rich we are in the West and can get very negative about it instead of thinking how privileged I am and what can I do, how can I appreciate it. So turning from negative to positive and that helped a lot.

Interviewer: Are there any changes with regards to the way you look at the world, the way you look at yourself, things like that?

Kacy: Interestingly enough that the dharma because my training has been in science and I have a really strong interest in evolutionary science.

Interviewer: Was it biology you did?

Kacy: Yes but I find that the dharma fits perfectly with all of that. It’s just a different way of looking at things ... no, the same truth are there from a different perspective. So the dharma encouraged me to explore scientific knowledge and give it some kind of framework, give it some kind of grounding, for example all the new stuff in neurobiology and evolutionary biology and stuff. To me that fits in totally with the dharma view. So in that way it gave me a whole lot more context of understanding. It’s allowed me ... because there’s been time in my life where I’d a bad spell through the menopausal and still working through it now as making a major sea change ... minor mental illness in terms of anxiety and what the doctor calls menopausal induced depression – your brain doesn’t work quite so well. So in terms of working through difficulties the dharma has helped me an awful lot in just being able to separate myself from, you know, ‘I am not my thoughts.’ Thoughts are just thoughts: they come and they go. So you can have a little bit of a separation.

Interviewer: And that separation, how does that work for you?

Kacy: It can help you from spinning off. You know you can start grasping so much. OK well ... when I was at my worse before I knew what was going on and got some treatment which was getting some HRT and some antidepressants, it was like you’d just spin off into this mini hell realm, from what the Tibetan calls it, in terms of being fearful, yet there was nothing to be afraid of. When you went and had a look at the fear to see what it was that you were afraid of, there was nothing there.

Interviewer: So you were fearful?
Kacy: Yes, fearful. So on a physiological way of describing it, my adrenal was in overload – too much cortisone sapping around. Thoughts were just going ‘urrrr urrrr urrr’ looping around and stuff like that. Dharma would really help me to make a little, little gap there, between me and the thought. So I could say ‘feeling crazy’ or ‘feeling frightened’ and I would be able to sit with it a bit instead of going ‘uh...uh...uh’ [tone and body language signifying going mad].

Interviewer: So the teaching and practice of mindfulness allowed you to put the gap in and have that separation so you didn’t go completely berserk.

Kacy: Yes. That’s an extreme when I was having a lot of difficulties. But the same happens a lot when your head is working normally but you having some difficulties with a person or something like that. And it might take a day but at least the gap happens and you think, “F***. I should have thought this,” or I said whatever. If you’re really lucky it can happen before you get angry. Or you start getting angry and you say, “Hang on.” Again that kind of gap – not being controlled by your emotions.

Interviewer: When were you first able to notice a gap?

Kacy: Straight away when I learnt to meditate ... because it was so different. This was after my first meditation retreat.

Interviewer: So you say “thinking.” Is that it or is there anymore to it?

Kacy: No it seems more like as an emotion starts to come up whether it would be minor irritation or something – you know how that every second there’s emotion going on - sometimes you would notice it so you would say ‘getting cranky’ instead of just having all this stuff come. In fact that would be for me the most, when I started meditating, the biggest thing I noticed, in terms of being quite different to me ... instead of being totally like a washing machine all the time.

Interviewer: It is quite amazing how, for example while driving, we are not present, drifting off. I was trying to observe this while coming here. Any time you could veer off the road because you are completely somewhere else. Just how you keep yourself alive is quite frightening.

Kacy: Everybody is doing it. But at the same time we do have this basic sense thing happening so we’re on automatic so when something does happen we can react fairly quickly.

Interviewer: We are on autopilot. That’s quite scary.

Kacy: Yes. Well most of our lives – that’s what the dharma says - like robots most of the time.

Interviewer: What do you see as your purpose in life.
Kacy: Well ... depends on the day. At one level, it is to do the best I can with what I have.

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Kacy: It means lots of things. It means don’t hurt people, be truthful to them and yourself, be kind, be generous, be a good person. That kind of stuff. And on another level it’s about ... It’s sort of funny, in the Tibetan tradition, they say you shouldn’t be doing this for anything else except for total enlightenment or buddhahood. That’s it! That’s the only reason. But there is a part of me that sort of is still back in kindergarten, even though when you’re doing your prayers and dedication and all of that, but there’s some part of me that still has got its training wheels in kindergarten ... like, “OK that would be great ... some time, I’ll get there [very perky tone].” Right now I’ve got to do these baby steps. So yes if I had the rote answer it would be to gain enlightenment, to help all sentient beings, even down to the language used, to achieve enlightenment and to help all sentient beings. But it is more I think on that second level, just to be kind and useful.

Interviewer: Is it correct to say that enlightenment is at the back of your mind?

Kacy: Absolutely because I met His Holiness. And there’s been a lot of other teachers but for me that’s the first and most strongest one. Again, that I’ve met a person who showed me that all things are possible. That it’s possible to be not just a human being ... to be a super human being.

Interviewer: Does enlightenment determine those ‘kindergarten’ goals?

Kacy: I think so. I think so. Because, using His Holiness’s words ... number 1, he’s my role model and I’ve been very fortunate to have met him. In words, when people ask him about being Buddhist is about he just says that it’s about being kind, and that’s his way of trying to make it simple for everyone. You know, acting kindly to everyone else including yourself. That pretty much sums it up.

Interviewer: What are the virtues that you most admired about His Holiness?

Kacy: 2 things: 1) Because I watched him the whole time I was in his company, his ability to be totally with whomever he was with - absolutely and totally. He is right here, present at all time. 2) How he has both ... his entire life spoken and acted in a non-violent fashion – so you know, walk the talk about not hating the Chinese. You know one of his most difficult jobs he has is right now at the moment there is a whole new wave of young displaced Tibetan youths who are really angry and they’d like to take up arms. And he’s trying to work with them saying that’s not the way, but they’re not listening. So they would be the 2 things: his ability to be present with people and act like he really, really cares about you, you know. And the next person he talks to is the same. And then this other thing about non-violence.

Interviewer: Describe what happiness is to you.
Kacy: I think happiness is about ... the word has so many different meanings.

Interviewer: But for you.

Kacy: For me, it would be about being content, which means about being ... this is just what’s happening now, it’s OK. And get little glimpses of it now and again. So it is about being able to be in a state of not wanting to be somewhere else or wanting something else or whatever. Even if it’s really not a nice situation and you’re saying that’s how it is – it’s all right. That for me would be complete happiness, I think. There’s all the other happiness you know about having people love you and so forth or having a pussycat ... happy ... he’s gone to bed, on my bed.

Interviewer: Did that understanding of happiness come from dharma?

Kacy: Yes. Absolutely.

Interviewer: Did you realise that soon?

Kacy: More intellectually earlier on and then you actually have little points where you’re just sitting somewhere or just walking along the beach and ... pretty good! Usually something really, really simple. Or sometime when you’re eating a really nice mango or something. Just ... you just think that this is not, you know ... or like they say in Australia, ‘You wouldn’t be dead for quids’ – that kind of moment. Do you understand what I’m saying there? And you can get that from a mango sometimes or diving into a wave or doing nothing.

Interviewer: Do you experience that on a daily basis?

Kacy: Bit more now than I used to, yes. And I think that’s about having a bit more space to have it in.

Interviewer: Do you ever feel fearful or lonely?

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: How do you cope with it?

Kacy: The lonely one is easy because you can actually do something physically about it like pick up the phone. I have a close family and a couple of good friends including a couple of good dharma friends. So you can actually do something about it. So that’s easy. The fearful one, again it’s the practice I had to learn in dharma, you just sit with it and look at it. Again trying to get that gap there, so it’s not my fear, it’s the fear. And fear’s a fear and everybody has all kinds of fear. Some people have more than others, that kind of stuff. There’s also a number of practices that are really useful for that. I learnt it a lot particularly when I was going through that tough time. In Tibetan language there’s one called Tonglen.
It’s taking and leaving on a breath is what Tonglen means. And it’s sort of a reverse of how you’d imagine a meditation to go. It’s where you … for example if you’re fearful which is the one I had, what you’d do you start … it’s really powerful practice after you get used to it … if you’re flipping out because you’re frightened, you think, “OK, lots of people in the world are doing this and far worse than me, people who have no control over their fear. They’re either being attacked or murdered or bombed or tortured or whatever. So what I can do is try to take on some of their pain for them.” So you imagine breathing in their fear and you imagine breathing it in like really thick, black smoke, and you breathe it down into your heart, and you extinguish it. And then you breathe out as white light to them, or blue water or whatever. It’s a really powerful technique of removing your thoughts from your fear and being able to think about other people’s fear and some compassion for them. So in other words, you stop doing the ‘poor me’ thing and think about other people.

Interviewer: Does that work?

Kacy: Oh absolutely. Really, really helpful. They have a number of practices for particular states that you can use.

Interviewer: Sitting with fear, how does that make you feel the first time or when you do it?

Kacy: Absolutely terrifying! But after a little while you just get a little bit of a gap, a little one … it doesn’t go away but it means that you’re not so controlled by it. Sort of like it sits there like you know when you have stomach ache. And you can think about it, “Ah my stomach is hurting,” but it’s just part of me. So some of those kinds of techniques you can sit with the fear and it’s there but it’s not so much ripping your heart. You feel it like a tension.

Interviewer: Does it go away after a while?

Kacy: It does but when I was in that bad state the only time it went away was when I took antidepressant. What was happening was my cortisone system, my whole adrenal, was being rewired again.

Interviewer: What is sutra training? Is it the study of the sutras?

Kacy: Yes, it’s studying and asking questions and sitting on your cushion and plodding along.

Interviewer: Sutra meditation?

Kacy: Yes. After mindfulness of breathing you sit. It’s called analytical meditation and you think about impermanence or death or loving-kindness or something. But because you’re in a meditative state a lot of times you think of something without words. It’s not so much at the cerebral level but more in body level.
Long Pause. No question asked

Kacy: I remembered just getting back to you know when we were talking about having difficulties of leading Westerners to the dharma, and back when I was still working on that committee and I met Dawa, the Australian monk who was the main organiser in Worcester. He went on to ... he was a physiotherapist before he was a monk but he went on to study at a Buddhist hospice in Tinvalle where they go out and look after people in their houses who are dying. I remembered being at lunch with him. He was very interested at the time because he was just starting his training in hospice, palliative care. He’d been doing a lot of studying about near-death experiences. I told him about mine because I’ve had one in that attack, that near-death experience. But it was really funny because I was telling it from the point of view of this happened to me, ‘poor me,’ you know what I mean. And he listened to me and he just burst out laughing. I was bit taken aback. Why? What’s so funny? Why are you so happy? Because he was laughing from being happy. And he said, “Do you realise how fortunate you are?” And I said, “No!” and I actually thought, “Poor me,” you know. And he said, “1. This happened to you; bad karma ripening; finished now.” And this is when I didn’t understand what he was saying but I remembered it profoundly. He said, “1. Bad karma ripening – finished, extinguished. 2. You survived. You’ve still got your precious human rebirth. Pretty good! 3. More than that, you don’t know it, but you’ve met the dharma.” He said, “You’re the luckiest person on the earth!” And I went ... It still didn’t sink in. It was later on that I got there a little bit because I still wanted to be ‘me the victim’ who survived this, because it was a bit of my identity. So it was very profound thinking he said to me.

Interviewer: Did he say that the near-death experience is the dharma?

Kacy: No, no. Meeting the dharma was the fact that I was standing there talking to a monk and hanging around with this bunch of Buddhists and that I was going to meet His Holiness the Dalai Lama which was about to happen. I didn’t know I’d met the dharma. I thought about it later but he was giving me a Buddhist explanation why I should be happy right now instead of feeling ‘Poor me’ ... ‘Poor me. I had this dreadful experience and I survived.’

Interviewer: That is pretty amazing. An average Australian would probably get very angry.

Kacy: Well, I didn’t want to hear it for a minute. I was like, “Get out of here! I want to feel good about myself being a victim,” was where I was at. Wanted people to say, “Poor you!” or “How terrible for you.” But he was saying how fortunate for you. I was going, “Hang on.”

Interviewer: I suppose it’s much better way of thinking than being a victim for the rest of you life.

Kacy: It was in practical terms: karma’s finished, you survived and so you’ve got human body, and 3) you don’t know it but you’re hanging around with these
Buddhists and you’ve met the dharma. Took a while to sink in. I was a bit cranky about it. It was like somebody had slapped me a bit. It was that kind of feeling. It was like ... there were other times right at the beginning when I was hanging around with these people and I was working on that committee and really interesting things would happen. Dawa one day took me out and we had to go out to meet the ... boss of Vietnamese Buddhists, their teachers, out at Sun Valley. This is because we have to tell him that His Holiness is coming and invite them along to all the events because for them they see him as the manifestation of Avalokitesvara. Basically the Dalai Lama is a manifestation of the Buddha of Compassion. Even though he’s not so important to them as the Tibetans they still think he’s a pretty good guy. So off we went to have lunch with the head monk. The community put on a lunch for us as honoured guests on a Sunday it was. Interesting enough because even though we were the 2 guests who were officially there an old friend of the Vietnamese guy had dropped in and he was a Tibetan monk but he was not in the lineage of the monk I was with. He was travelling through and had come to visit his friend. We were sitting there at lunch and I was very shy because I don’t know what the protocols are and there were no other women in the room. The women served them and they left and it was just the Vietnamese monk, the Tibetan monk, the Australian Tibetan monk and me, having dinner. And then the Vietnamese monk and the Tibetan monk started telling stories about the time they were in prison and being tortured, because the Vietnamese guy was in Lhasa, by the communist rebels at the time. And the Tibetan guy was locked up by the Chinese. But you know as they were telling the stories they were making jokes out of that. And they were picking themselves laughing, the two of them. And they were little wizened up people. They both ‘Zzzzzz’ [snickering in jest] and they were telling jokes about the time they were in prison and being tortured. And I was just sitting there. And I said in my little voice because I didn’t know what to say, “What did you think about when you were being tortured? How was it [horrified voice]?” And the Vietnamese guy, he just looked at me and said, “You know, it was really hard. It was really, really hard! But I tried to practice compassion at every moment.” And I just went, “Ur, Ur, Ur ... [shocked amazement].” I then I went, “Ah well” in my heart. Because I had never met people like this before. And then that little moment was finished and then they went back to telling jokes about being in prison and laughing. It just blew me away! I’d never met people like this you see.

Part 3 (18 March 2005)

Interviewer: Can you tell me about Buddhist ethics and precepts in terms of your Tibetan tradition?

Kacy: The precepts are about not killing, not taken what you've not been given, not lying, not being intoxicated, sexual misconduct, those kinds of stuff ... these are the ethics or *sila* that you try to work with.

Interviewer: How many of them do you uphold?
Kacy: I like to think that I uphold all of them ... eight of them in all: not killing, not stealing, not lying, not being intoxicated, not engaging in sexual misconduct, or idol talk, or malicious gossip and right view. I like to say I adhere to all of them but, you know, I think they’re just reminders for all that we have to uphold. For on one side you’ve got the things that say don’t do it and on the other side you have the virtuous actions that you do try to do ... you try to speak truthfully, you try avoid killing the ants or creating the situations where the ants will die in like my washing up [sink with dishes, ants crawling in to drown] ... All those sorts of things.

Interviewer: Before you engaged in Buddhism, did you have any of them?

Kacy: I had some from the Christian commandments but different kind of understanding. Like they were don’t do those or you’re going to be punished, like daddy’s going to spank you. Whereas the Buddhist point of view is much more interesting because they say in Tibet, it’s not that you shouldn’t do them, it’s that they’re not very skilful. If you do them you are acting out of ignorance. And if you avoid doing them you are acting skilfully. And I feel that that shifts everything back to your own responsibility and thinking about it. So it’s quite a different way of looking at it. I have to say of all of them the sexual misconduct is the tricky one in contemporary Australian lifestyle.

Interviewer: Why?

Kacy: In Tibetan tradition it’s about adultery and a number of other things but that’s the main thing. By adultery that means not just people who are married but anyone who has a relationship ... is a no go area for that. It’s not just about sleeping with people who are not your partner; it’s about even flirting with them, about even setting up those kinds of situation. And I have to say in the past I was pretty slack about that because there’s a bit of a contemporary view that you can do what you like. You can pretend you’re not hurting anyone. That kind of stuff. But as you get older you realise that there’s no such thing as being able to do that without people being hurt or harm. Often it’s yourself. Because it can be like abusing your own body just by using it you know, instead of being thoughtful about those kinds of relationship

Interviewer: So have you adjusted and become better?

Kacy: Yes. But twice in my life its’ been tricky where ... and I found it quite difficult ... where married men have fallen in love with me and wanted to purse a relationship without having left their wife at the time.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Kacy: Um ... First time was hard because I was actually a bit in love with that person myself and in the end I said to him, “I can’t do this because you’re married. Every time I even think of it ...” Like I love being with him because we would have been perfectly suited to each other. He was a conservation biologist.
I used to go and do lots of trips with him and stuff. So we shared a lot of stuff but I wasn’t his wife. And I had to say to him, “No, you have to go away.”

Interviewer: Because of this precept. I knew that number one the reason we have 8 precepts is that these are the really hard stuff. I forget what they say in the Tibetan tradition like there’s 84,000 unskilful acts you can do but these are big ones, you know and the most common ones that we do. So it’s not something to be taken lightly. And I have taken that lightly in the past. There has been times where I have been in relationship and I have been adulterous, you know, I’ve slept with other people and things like that, in my youth ... because I didn’t think it mattered. Yes and that was really hard because at the same time I wanted to be with this person and it could have very easily been ... I said to him, “Yes, come on move in,” and his married would have been disrupted and we would have been in a lot of pain. We might have ended up being very happy together but I wasn’t prepared to take that responsibility. It was very painful times. And you know what, he’s still with his wife now. They’ve managed to sort of work things through by themselves.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that?

Kacy: I’m happy for them. A bit sad for me because whenever I see him there is still a really strong ‘thing’ and I still think wouldn’t it be nice. We could have done nice things but I’m very happy for them. They seem to be managing quite well.

Interviewer: It seems that the precepts have changed your life then.

Kacy: Absolutely. In the past I would have been a lot more casual about it. I would have, you know how you go crazy, I would have let that endorphin and stuff like that overrule me.

Interviewer: What about the other precepts? How do you find them? What about non-killing?

Kacy: That’s a real dilemma because we do it all the time and I have to work with what His Holiness says that we do it all the time like when we walk, drive a car or in fact when I’m drinking water I’m killing things. Like His Holiness says, “The least we can do, is to do least harm.” Even if it is all we can do, it is pretty good.

Interviewer: An average Australian sees an insect and bang kills it. Was there a change for you when you took up Buddhism?

Kacy: Yeh, I’ve always been very respectful of life just from my biological training. But I would have been a lot more thoughtless for example this ant thing, you know. I would have turned the tap on, get them out of the way because I want to wash up. Now I have to like for example when I shower, because they all come up my shower as well at the moment ... before I shower I have to pick them all out, and then have a shower. Because otherwise I’ve knowingly have killed those
ants, just because I’m in a hurry to have a shower. So those kinds of behaviours have just made me think a lot more. Yes.

Interviewer: How about lying, especially when you were doing business where there are shades of lying?

Kacy: In some of the teachings I’ve had and the teachers I’ve talked to talks a lot about that. That precept doesn’t necessarily mean you should tell the truth at all time if it’s going to harm a situation. Like for example they use ... like if somebody is about to be killed and they’re running away and you see them go down that way and then the next thing the guys with the guns come along, you’re not going to say he went that way. You just say, “I don’t know,” or something like that, because telling the truth will cause harm to them. So it’s about being skilful. But it all comes down to checking your motivation and being truthful might mean just not telling something. Again making you think why you should say this kind of thing. The tricky one is the gossiping one. How do they use the terms? Idol talk or malicious gossip or something like that. Now that is really hard because we do it all the time. You have to really watch for it. There’s a particular style where you get into bagging people ... you know a guy who did this and then it’s nothing this person did this and then you go you, you, you ... that kind of stuff and it serves no purpose, except to make you feel good about yourself because you’ve made everyone else look bad.

Interviewer: With all these precepts, how do you try and keep them?

Kacy: A number of ways like through reminding myself by doing your reading, listening to teachings which I do a lot of. I’ve got CDs of teachings. I have a routine of doing my yoga and exercise and have the CD running while I do that ... like concentrating at the same time. There are the actual ritual aspects like prayers that remind me of these things. Also you do precepts when on retreats ... or a couple of precepts days then.

Interviewer: I noticed that you drink wine, is there a precept against alcohol and intoxicants?

Kacy: There is but it’s about ... they say avoid it if you can because it makes your mind fuzzy. I only have a glass of wine very occasionally.

Interviewer: Do you feel that taking alcohol in moderation is OK?

Kacy: I think so but by moderation is sort of like very little. Half a glass, one glass, no more. Because I do get affected after that. If I have 2 glasses I’m pissed. Again it’s all about keeping your mind clear. If you’re going to meditate why mess it up?

Interviewer: With the precepts in mind, and the actual meditative practices in the daily life and retreats, how have these things affected your relationships with
people? Have there been changes to your relationship with family, friends and other human beings who you may or may not like?

Kacy: With friends, friends have changed completely. The kind of friends I hang out with. For example in my youth ... but I had stopped it before I got involved in Buddhism ... I use to take intoxicants a lot! Mainly alcohol and recreational drugs. And the kinds of people I mixed with did that as well. Out of that whole circle of friends there’s only one or two I still see. Yes, because you just haven’t got interest in what they do anymore. So I spend far less friends with people like that hitting around getting stoned. Even those friends I still see I’m not around when they do that. I’ll see them for morning tea or something. So that’s about it. And of course then I have been lucky to have, ever since I got involved in the dharma, at least two or three people who have become really close dharma friends. So I spend more time with those people actually talking about dharma and practicing dharma.

Interviewer: So would I be correct in saying that dharma has been partially responsible for moving from those old friends

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: Maybe you were moving away in the first place but ...

Kacy: Both. In terms of my family ...

Interviewer: Sorry with those new friends, has it made your life better? Are you happier?

Kacy: Oh yes! Yes. And those kinds of friendship are different. You know, some friendship is about how good people make you feel, that kind of stuff or how they look up to you or whatever. These friendships are more about trust and exchange because you actually share some pretty scary stuff with those people. And you know you can because as they say in Tibetan stuff, ‘your dharma brothers and sisters’ and you actually share those kinds of things and feel OK about it. So yes it’s a different level of trust with those people.

Interviewer: So a higher level of trust with those people. And with your family, let’s say you mentioned your mother and father, has there been anything?

Kacy: Yes there have. When I first got involved in the dharma they were a bit sussed, you know, that it was a cult. But it sort of helped that His Holiness was an internationally recognised figure and so that added credibility for them. And then they actually saw me change, and they actually thought, “Well this is ... this is for me. This is working for her. She seems to be happier. It’s OK by us.”

Interviewer: What aspect of change did they like?
Kacy: I’m extrapolating here. I would have imagined it would be that I was ... a number of things I guess they were seeing me a lot calmer, a lot more stable, not so easily rocked, because you know I had the tendency to fly of the handle a little bit, or be a bit sharp-tongued. But I’ve tempered that a lot. I have. People have told me I’ve got better on that one.

Interviewer: Do you think that is because of dharma?

Kacy: Absolutely! And also because there was one point when I was just getting involved in the dharma that my sharp tongue actually cost me two friends. They weren’t dharma friends but they were friends who I valued. Plus the dharma I got to see the highlights of the effects of careless speech, because that’s what happened with me being careless. Also in Buddhism there’s an awful lot of respect to be given to your parents. So they would have seen my attitudes to them being a lot more respectful I think.

Interviewer: Is it more respectful?

Kacy: Yes it is, and more appreciative that they’ve given me life and generally these opportunities. And now they’re getting old and I actually make sure I keep in touch and go and visit them and look after them and that kind of stuff. So those things. They would have seen those actions I think.

Interviewer: For me I still have some difficulties dealing with my parents and despite Buddhism. Sometimes we don’t see eye to eye. Do you have any such difficulties?

Kacy: No, not with my parents and in fact my sisters come to me sometimes because they get really angry with my father in particular. So I say, “That’s how he is and he’s not going to change, he’s has always been that way. What you can do is change here [in yourself] and try and help them a little bit like that. Stop expecting him to approve of what ...” because this is what usually it is all about even though they are 55 or something – they are still wanting him to approve of what they do. And it’s pretty tricky because he’s an old man now and often he’s no idea of what we’re going through and the world’s change so much. But in terms of my family it has helped me a lot. I have a younger sister that I do find quite difficult. The dharma’s helped me a lot in trying to work with her.

Interviewer: In what way?

Kacy: She ... she does it to me but she does it with my other sisters because we have the tendency to view her the same way ... that she can really be irritating like really push your button and really outrageous and hurtful things, not just being smart like I have a tendency to be, but really awful. Once I started to learn some dharma techniques ... and I was talking about that loving-kindness meditation ... she was the one. She was in there with me, trying to send loving-kindness. And for years she’s been the one I’ve stuck in there to do my loving-kindness meditation.
Interviewer: And when she comes up what happens?

Kacy: It’s not a problem now. I was a problem because you’d hold her there for 10 seconds and get angry with her, and then you have to come back to your breath and then realign yourself and send the light again. She’s not a problem now so much so that we all went on a holiday together the four of us for the first time. The three sisters knew ... the other two talked about how we would manage Ginger, the younger one, when she got out of hand because we all have difficulties with her. But we all managed quite well.

Interviewer: Does she still say hurtful things?

Kacy: She does but what we tend to do now is not react to them so much. Turn it into a joke or ... So we’ve modified our behaviour a bit. Once you stop reacting things calm down a little bit.

Interviewer: Have you been a leader in being calmer?

Kacy: I think I have but in a way I was the one with the biggest problem with her. I think I’ve been influential in being able to talk to them and say that I have these problems and what I intend to do about it rather than pretend that’s everything is nice which is what they tend to do. So that’s when we decided to go on a holiday together.

Interviewer: Have you ever stopped this sibling issue with dharma practice?

Kacy: Yes. Lots. It’s been helpful because they remind you of things, for example, it might say that what she’s doing is empty, or you might try a meditation, or in Tibetan they say that that might not be your sister, it might be Manjuri, who is the manifestation of wisdom, and he’s there giving you an opportunity to practice. So in other words, the kinds of techniques to make that gap, to shift a little bit. And instead of saying, “I’m going to fucking kill you,” you go “Ah ... opportunity to practice dharma, thank you!” So it can bring a bit of humour to it which is, you know, to make that gap a little bit somehow.

Interviewer: What about the example you mentioned in the car, that nasty guy the business owner, how does dharma influence the way you deal with those people you dislike, especially when you’re with him?

Kacy: A number of ways because without the dharma I would think him as terrible, something like, “What a bastard. I’m not going to have anything to do with him,” or be angry and put it down without thinking. At least now with dharma I know what’s happening with me here. That it’s not him doing it; it’s how I’m reacting to it. So it is my responsibility to manage that. That’s the big thing. I’m aware a lot more ... you know when those emotions start coming. It might not help me right at the moment but I can sometimes feel a little bit later that was what’s going on, how I am going to handle things a bit better next time and stuff,
you know. And again using that loving-kindness meditation. And the other thing His Holiness teaches you about ... just reminding yourself that he's just like you, wants to be happy ... exactly the same as you. Again trying to get those gaps going about. Not 'you versus me' that kind of stuff. But he is very manipulative, egotistical and very clever. So very hard to deal with him. One of my dharma friend, Tracy, who you're get to meet is also a psychologist and I actually went to her and said I need help with this person. She gave me a whole lot of techniques to working with this person. So she gave me some Western psychology but from a dharma perspective, and it's been very, very useful. And I'm now actually not having so much difficulties now. What the dharma has done for me in terms of difficult people, like I was saying being invited on to the tourism board, it's made me realise that you just don't run away ... you know, you run away from these things if you can't handle them. But if there's an opportunity here to learn a little bit more about yourself, then do it. It's like it's being presented to you. In the Tibetan tradition, they say that all of these problems coming toward you are your opportunities to practice. And when people are highly advanced in their practice they are almost saying “Come on, come on ... problems, come on.” Because they see it both as a purification and the same time opportunity to put it in practice! But being sensible about it, like if someone's going to hurt you, you get out. But if it's minor irritations and difficult people you hang in there because you're going to get something out of it.

Interviewer: You mentioned the gap several times can you describe as precisely as you can when the gaps appear.

Kacy: Sometimes it appears only long time after the emotion has gone. Like things happens and you react. And that's really the whole essence of Buddhism in one way. But it is how you react to them that is the skilful action. So things happen, everything happens ... that is just karma and life, you know. And while we are fairly ignorant in our way of things ... we just got these emotions that just ... we're like a puppet with the emotions. Even though I've been practicing for 12 years or so - I'm not a good meditator, I'm a baby meditator in terms of progress I've seen – but that for me was some of the biggest indicators of that the stuff works, that Buddhism works. Because you actually get to see yourself getting angry; you get to see yourself being lustful instead of just being dragged along by this stuff. And that is what I mean by the gap. And it just means, we might just react not to do that or at least be aware that that's what's going on. When you are really good, I reckon that it happens just as that emotion arises. But for me it happens later, or sometimes even a day later and you know you think, “Oh God!”

Interviewer: So are you saying that that gives you a choice?

Kacy: Yes, which comes back to the precept because it's about the choice of not doing that. I choose not to wash those ants away. So there's a little gap there that's noticing what you're doing or thinking or feeling.

Interviewer: You don't have any children right?
Kacy: No.

Interviewer: What is your opinion on the idea of having children?

Kacy: I did want children in my 30’s but we have a sociological label now, we’re called ‘infertile by circumstances.’ So in other words there wasn’t a man around or the person you were with did not want children or being unstable, and that was the way I was at. I had this partner who was really unstable and did not want children. I look back now and think that it would have been a good thing to have, to do, because it is a marvellous opportunity. But it’s also incredible hard work. On the other side, it’s having to accept that, “No I can't have children because I’m 52 now.” I had to accept that when I turned 40. It’s all over now, no more eggs. And again that whole thing about contentment, about what it is that you actually have and appreciating it.

Interviewer: For you then, Buddhism or dharma doesn’t have an influence on whether you have or does not have children?

Kacy: No, I don’t think so. It’s also a cultural thing. I have seen anything in the teachings or anything like that.

Interviewer: Is it now about contentment because of circumstances?

Kacy: It’s about acceptance that I don’t have children. There are other positive things I have. I think about it a lot now as I get older and I see my mum and dad and how much they enjoy their children, and also when I see friends of mine, [and their] parents who are in nursing homes and things like that, and the children are looking after them. I haven’t got that! But that’s my life, that’s my karma I guess. I’ll have to work with that.


Kacy: OK this is a very strong example. When I was 28 and having a very difficult time with that court case and stuff like that, I fell pregnant, not to that person but to my boyfriend at the time. And I was bit mad and had an abortion. Didn’t even think too much of it at the time, just that I can't cope ... too mad and had taken too much drugs. Then not so long ago, about a year ago, I was listening to the teaching on skilful means and about killing and the whole question of abortion, and the Western culture towards it. I listened and actually saw how at the time circumstances weren’t good for me in terms of the choice I made, but actually how unskilful act that was, to have an abortion at that time. And in the Tibetan tradition once you’ve realised that there something you did that was pretty bad, they have all these rituals to do that try to purify that, otherwise the karma keeps growing. So I did a whole lot of prayers around that thing, recognising that unskilful action and having regret for it. To be honest doing something like the mentoring [Kacy is helping a teenager at a school] ... the purification practice that you do you actually recognise what you did, bring out sincerely regret and then you say you’re not going to do it again, and then you have to come up with an
antidote. This is the four-point purification process that you’re supposed to do everyday, so that the karma doesn’t multiply. With that I knew I had to do something about another young person’s life to make up for the life I’d cut short. That’s why I’m doing the mentoring. It’s my way of doing the antidote for that negative karma I created earlier in my life, giving my time to this young person.

Interviewer: What I’m feeling is that you have some guilt over that abortion ...

Kacy: No. There was no regret then ... with that particular teaching on skilful mean and karma was what I thought was fairly inconsequential was in the Buddhist was not. It was actually a very unskilful act with pretty big karmic implication. That is not guilt but shifting my perspective more to it. But therefore that is a big thing and therefore I have to do something about it.

Interviewer: We talked about purpose in life in Tibetan Buddhism previously. Before you started practicing Buddhism what purpose did you have?

Kacy: Intellectually I had my scientific purpose of trying to understand the world. That was my training.

Interviewer: Was that your goal in life?

Kacy: Pret... much. And that’s why Buddhism fitted in neatly with that. It just opened up more to a more metaphysical way in which the world works. No I had no other purpose except the usual ones of ambition, acquiring status.

Interviewer: Since you started practici... Buddhism, is ‘acquiring status’ still there?

Kacy: It’s still there, yes, but not as much. Like for example it’s important to me in that little group to be seen as credible, accepted ... just that they think I’m worthwhile. So that’s part of it and that I think is a human think until you get to be enlightened and then it doesn’t matter. When I started studying Buddhism I began to notice it much more in other people and in my own action. I start to notice when I was going, “Blah, blah, blah” and noting myself. And you think why am I doing that and it’s usually because you’re feeling a bit small. Then you notice it in other people.

Interviewer: And did that tend to put a brake to it?

Kacy: On myself, yes. And it built up right til the last 2 years of my business where my business partner’s and my interest were completely the opposite. Where I was just concerned with running an ethical business, paying the staff and doing a reasonable job, for her it was bigger, better and more. In the end we could not get on at all.

Interviewer: Are you saying that dharma played a role in that change?
Kacy: Yes. It made me see that all of this striving is useless. You know, it just fills up the time. It’s like a way of avoiding being alive. You think you’re being alive because you’re having all your adrenalin running, and you’ve got this meeting, this deadline and all of that, but while you’re doing all of that you’re not listening to the rain coming down, talking to another person, you know what I mean...

Interviewer: In theory, a business is there to grow. Usually people want to grow their business. So that was there for your partner but for you, I’m hearing, that drive to grow eventually ceased or you were not interested in, whereas in the beginning you were interested in?

Kacy: Yes because it made me feel good about myself. The more jobs you had on the white board, the busier you were - and you see this all throughout society – therefore the more admirable you are, the more worthy you are.

Interviewer: Can you tell me why you didn’t see the necessity of that growth or having all those businesses on the wall? Was there a trigger point when you realised that I don’t want to do this?

Kacy: No, it was slow. I still needed to do it to make a living and I still needed to it in a way of engaging and being part of community. To be able to do it through word was a privilege. You see that when people don’t have work they can be very depressed, immobilised and not able to live a happy life. Good work – Right Livelihood and that kind of stuff - is a marvellous privilege and something like 90% of the world hasn’t got.

Interviewer: So you were saying it was a gradual process. Can you take me through the process that made you say, “I want to make it small”?

Kacy: The process was about being ... still needing the work to come in because I had a staff to pay and they had family. So the shift then was away from, “We’ve got all these amazing jobs, aren’t we clever” to “We’ve got these jobs coming in, good, that mean I can pay my staff and pay their family.” So there was a shift that way.

Interviewer: Why did you think that way?

Kacy: Because I’m their boss and trying to run a business with ethical principles which was difficult with a partner who did not see any of that. I felt very responsible for their well-being.

Interviewer: Did you have that sheet by then?

Kacy: Yes. And we had discussions around my office and they agreed but they weren’t committed to it in any way because I actually ran the business side of the business as well as doing some of the consulting, like all of the books, all of the paying, liaison with the staff and that sort of stuff. So I was very concerned about the ethical side of that, and the responsibility I had for other people.
Interviewer: It looks like the purpose of your business is changing?

Kacy: Yes, away from my ego to more practical things of making a living, making a bit of a difference in my work. Rather than “I’m making a difference”, it’s more about “I’m making the difference.” A shift away from my personal ego, “Aren’t I clever doing all of this,” to “What have we achieved here in the end?”

Interviewer: From bigger ‘I’ to little ‘i’.

Instead of “I did this,” to “I did this.” Shift that way. It was slow, really slow. It happened gradually. You sort of meditating, talking to your dharma friends and you’re sort of thinking about things, and every now and then you crack on to something you’re working on like the Diamond Essence, that book – Ah this is what I’m trying to do with my business ... in Buddhist terms. Ah, I get it now! Then you do a bit of a jump. Those kinds of things. So you go gradual, gradual, gradual, jump ... gradual, gradual, gradual, jump when you get some insight or a particular thing comes, just when you needed it.

Interviewer: Was there tension is this shift that you’re talking about?

Kacy: Huge, huge!

Interviewer: Was there tension in yourself and was there tension in the organisation?

Kacy: Yes, both. And that contributed to me going batty. My business partner was also a bully. After a while, at the end, I went, “I’m out of here. I don’t want to deal with this any more. I’m getting iller and iller. I’m out.”

Interviewer: Is that why you moved here?

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: What about consumption? Has Buddhism influenced you in the way you consume, the things or types of things you buy?

Kacy: I has to a certain degree but that was fairly strong ... my whole environment philosophy was that way anyway.

Interviewer: So what is the influence of Buddhism if any?

Kacy: It’s the shift in environment ethics of you know saying that you shouldn’t do this and that because you’re contributing to the green house gas and there’s a whole lot of environmental guilt in Western environmental education. I have done that a lot and put it on other people. I can remember one of my friend saying to me earlier, “You’re an ecofascist,” when I went to him and open his cupboard and started saying, “You shouldn’t have that and you shouldn’t have this,” and he was
a conservation biologist and my good friend. He said it laughing. It shifted that from the guilty and the ‘should’ to a little bit more of an understanding about how it does actually harm other people, and how not doing it is not a negative action, it’s a positive action. It’s that skilful means again.

Interviewer: So it’s a more positive view.

Kacy: Yes. Instead of saying, “Don’t do it and feeling guilty,” it is more like, “I choose not to do this because it’s the wrong thing to do. I know it’s a good thing karmically for me and good karmically for the planet.” So it turned it around. Even though it’s subtle it’s a really strong thing.

Interviewer: That is a big change.

Kacy: And then there is a bigger thing about consumption. And there’s a whole lot of environmental gloom that people can get very depressed about. Have you read Joanna Macy’s book? She talks about it there a lot where you just feel paralysed by the enormity of the disaster going on around you.

Interviewer: Have you felt that?

Kacy: Yes. I think it’s more a Western thing than an Eastern thing. Both with my understanding of the world and evolution and change, coupled with my now Buddhist perspective which is over countless lifetimes, countless galaxies ... coming, going, life unfolding and changing ... I don’t feel so gloomy any more. I feel sad, sad that people are suffering, but I don’t feel gloomy and paralysed ... and that is a very healthy thing. It is like we were talking this morning, soon human beings will go. Whereas in the past that would be for me ... oh ... unbelievably paralysing in a way, whereas now I can get the sense of ... well ... this is what happens in the world. Things come and things ... combined with my scientific thought but with the whole ... so it doesn’t quite matter so much on one level. The pain and suffering matter enormously. But the fact that there is rebirth, there is bodhisattva, there are buddhas, there are good people working wherever, it’s OK.

Interviewer: Without putting words into your mouth, it seems that you appreciate things on a much grander timescale.

Kacy: Yes. The suffering is still horrible and the bombings and wars and the fact that species are going ... horrible! But it’s not like I want to kill myself now because there’s no future.

Interviewer: Have you ever practice some of those Joanna Macy techniques?

Kacy: No. I found that very Deep Ecology stuff, when I was doing my thesis in particular, it didn’t gel well with me. I actually found myself a bit repelled by it to be honest. Things may have change ... some of the feeling I got was that all this is very well but social justice is very important to me too, and I felt that that was
what was missing. It was sort of nature’s right over everything else, and that can never be, not while we’re human beings. We’re never going to be able to say, “It happens. Sorry these people will have to die.” That’s immoral for me, sorry, unethical for that to happen. And that’s where I felt that Deep Ecology was a bit too far.

Interviewer: When did you turn semi-vegetarian?

Kacy: That was before Buddhism.

Interviewer: Why?

Kacy: Ethical issues about factory farming and cruelty. Bad ethics on how they treat animals.

Interviewer: In your interpretation, how does Buddhism relate to vegetarianism?

Kacy: It’s talked about a lot because most of the monks do actually eat meat. So your teachers and your lamas are meat-eaters, because that’s their culture. And it has to do with the fact that up there they don’t have very many vegetables. It’s a cultural thing and even away from there where there is vegetable it’s something they prefer to do.

Interviewer: What’s your opinion?

Kacy: My opinion is do the least harm. If you can avoid it do so. It’s a dodgy one that one. But it’s a tricky one ... we were out with a Buddhist group, somebody had cooked up a meal and they were going to be sponsor of the tour – they were going to give some donations – and they’d cooked chicken. Now here is a monk and he does not eat meat at all. I was sitting there and they served me chicken and I said to him, “What are you going to do?” and he looked at me and said, “I’m going to eat a very small amount of this. This sister has given us a gift; I’m going to eat it.” So in terms of absolute thing, don’t do this, don’t do that ... it’s about each situation being quite different, and for him to not eat the meat it would have been refusing their gift ... not allowing them to be generous, not allowing them the gift of giving. So it’s about motivation. It is about being thoughtful about things instead of being black and white about things ... I think for a lot of Westerners where they come from a Christian tradition which is very much that of right or wrong, heaven or hell, black or white, no in-between ... that they get it mixed up a bit. They take their training and they apply some of the Buddhist stuff to that – I’ve seen it happen a bit.

Interviewer: Have you ever done that?

Kacy: No because of my Christian upbringing because my father would always try to logically talk me through these things. These sorts of questions, that kind of stuff.
Part 5 (19 March 2005)

Kacy: I had a 3-day vipassana retreat just before His Holiness’s visit. On that retreat – I hadn’t done any formal practice before – what happened was even though there was lots of walking, talking and chanting, and you do a lot of walking, I came back from Tinvale and my back shoulder spasmed, like really hard. I started having these dreadful dreams. Like the day I got back my back went. The dreams were all about me stabbing and killing people. They were just horrible. Where did these come from? I immediately rang up an acupuncturist I knew and she’s very spiritual person. She put her hands on me and said, “What have you been doing?” I said, “I went to a meditation retreat.” She said, “You’ve moved something. Something has moved.” Because she knew me, she knew me, you know I was telling you about the salt and the pork. She said it had to do with that. The meditation has brought up some memory … you know they talk about how we put things away in our body, where they’re safe and you don’t have to deal with them. So I saw her for a week. Just went back everyday and she did the cupping and did some acupuncture and just moved it. And the thing – it was a thing, like a mass like this in my body – it actually moved and she worked on it from here, right up to my shoulder. And then when it got to my shoulder, this thing … it all broke out into boils. And the dreams stopped! Pretty weird. In the dream I wasn’t being attacked I was doing the attacking. But it came out as boils and went puff! Then the dream stopped. For me it was like … God, the power of our mind, you know … just by me doing 3 days of a baby course on meditation was able to touch some psychological stuff that I hadn’t been able to deal with very well and got rid of it.

Interviewer: And did you feel a release of your emotions?

Kacy: Yes, it was like clear.

Interviewer: Did you feel that something repressed had come up like the acupuncturist had said?

Kacy: Yes, yes. Because it came and went, because it started the day I got back from meditation and 8 more days it was finished, when symbolically or something it burst out.

Interviewer: Maybe that was the end of your karma.

Kacy: For that? Yes.

Interviewer: Can you go through the points in the Ten Principles of Enlightened Business and what each means to you?

Kacy:
Principle 1: ‘Enhancing the well-being of others’
It means the people I employ or sub-contract. It means that I am contributing to them as well, to their lives. In other words, a sense of responsibility to taking care
of the people I'm working with. But on the other hand there is another, different objective about that. It means to check what I'm doing or are involved with is not actually causing anybody any harm but more than that it is actually adding to our social capital or whatever.

Interviewer: Is that from the compassion ideal?

Kacy: Yes, it’s from the compassion ideal but it’s also more about right livelihood ideal, like for example you could be involved with something derogatory to the environment or involved in animal cruelty or child slavery. So you have to check the work that you do that doesn’t do anything like that, but it actually benefits people. So it’s not only about my Buddhist thoughts but my whole thing about social justice. Well the responsibility to the whole society is a Buddhist thing, but anyway ...

Principle 2: Respect your financial commitments
Pay your debt, don’t owe anyone, don’t use anyone, that kind of stuff.

Principle 3: Act with absolute equanimity
It’s about trying to remind yourself to be a little bit detached of what’s going on so you can actually see what’s happening, rather than your whole ego being caught up in things. Because usually the people you’re working with, their egos are very caught up in things. So when yours is too, the flames get higher and higher. And the idea is if you can maintain a bit of equanimity, you’ll be able to get a few wisdom in what’s going on and understand the whole thing. So you work best then. But it’s also the fact that being a little bit calmer, makes other people will be a bit calmer.

Principle 4: Convey true impressions
It means being very scrupulous about telling the truth. And it also means avoiding giving misleading impressions of other people. You know we can often have a little bit of a sarcastic word or something like that. It gives the people who we’re dealing with or talking about is not responsible or something like that.

Interviewer: Even though it’s very subtle.

Kacy: Yes. Just the tone of the voice that you use or something like that. So again, being very, very truthful.

Interviewer: Do you find that easy or hard?

Kacy: It gets easier the harder you try.

Principle 5. Bring people together
Some of these are all quite connected. My work is supposed to be about that, the environmental work that I do. And it’s about continually trying to work to keep that kind of dialogue going, so that solutions can be looked up from a whole number of different ways. It also reminds me that I’m in the privileged position of being
‘the expert.’ But I have to be careful that I don’t put myself forward as ‘the expert’ so much that other people can’t be heard. Bring people together, yes, try ... and if there’s a situation where there’s a conflict or it’s difficult – things I hate the most – I have to try to work with that.

Principle 6. Speak professionally and respectfully

Principle 7. Speak about meaningful things
That’s about all of the gossips that goes on and putting people down. Yes just spilling up in the air with all that rah, rah, rah bullshit that we do. It’s that whole area of trying to bring up, keep conversation going and not have quiet spots.

Principle 8. Find happiness in what you have
This one is about instead of being acquisitive the whole time ... it relates to this one [Principle 9] too especially being jealous of other people, so that when others are successful we think, “Why not I?” But it’s about being ... just saying, “This is what I have, this is good, being grateful, being appreciative of it, rather than thinking, “OK, I’ve got this car now; I will get one that will make me happy,” rather than, “Aren’t I actually lucky to have a car.” On an environmental level, it’s to remind me not to be so acquisitive or wanting more and more. On a Buddhist level, it’s more about expressing gratitude for what you have: the moment, the health, the fact that I can do this, that I’ve had this education, that I’m in this position to be able to do something, that kind of thing.

Principle 9. Celebrate others’ achievements
This is really important because if we don’t then we have this envy thing going. And also be joyful for other people.

Principle 10. See the hidden potential of all things
Now this one is on one level about really opening yourself up because there are hidden things, because if something happens to us we often have this really fixed idea, and if it’s not what we think should happen we just dismiss it. But in everything that happens, it’s empty. The thing that has happened is empty. How we deal with it is the trick in terms of what it opens up. For example, there’s this Tibetan parable used in a lot of their teachings: There was this lama who had a family. One day his horse escaped and it was his only horse, and his friends said, “How terrible! How are you going to plough the field? This is a terrible, terrible thing.” And he said, “Could be good and could be bad.” The next day the horse comes back and has four other horses with him. Next thing his only son falls of the roof and breaks his leg and the friends say, “How terrible, what a terrible, terrible thing.” But again he says, “Could be good and could be bad.” But what happened was the next day the emperor’s generals came around and conscripted every young man in the village to go off and fight in a war. So because his son had a broken leg, didn’t get to go. So it’s like that kind of paradigm, about seeing the hidden things. It’s also about not just immediately judging something to be good or bad, right or wrong, because what you do with the situation either here and then having to do physically ... it is like one of my
teacher said, “Buddhism is all about things happens, and how you deal with them.” For her that’s the whole path that is in that kind of stuff.

Interviewer: Is that emphasised a lot in the teachings to the Westerners?

Kacy: Yes. It really strikes a cord to us because we’re really action-oriented.

Interviewer: Like things have to be logical. Some things are not.

Kacy: Absolutely. Yes. But also behind all of that is ... as I said, it’s been derived from the Diamond Sutra ... taking the Diamond Sutra and applying it to the Western business life ... if you do each of these you will ensure that a whole lot of negative things don’t happen. It’s sort of interesting, they say that for example if in your business ... this could be incorrect but it gives you a kind of ... because I have to look it up, if in your business all of a sudden you find that you’re making contracts and things are happening but things start to fall through, they say that the solution for that is that you should go back into your business with your staff and those you work with and see if there’s any sort of sexual harassment or acts of cruelty and stuff like that going on. Because if you’re not taking care of those kinds of things it will cause this kind of stuff to happen in your business. Underlying all of this is saying, “You do all of these things as best you can in your business, you will succeed in business. You will have a healthy business, a happy business that benefits other people. You will have prosperity.” And for that they say immediately that having prosperity and wealth, “You can use that to help other people and do other things.” In the whole of the Buddhist tradition there’s nothing wrong with being wealthy – it’s the result of good karma in the past – what’s really important is what you do with that wealth. It’s preventative medicine. Instead of having things go wrong in your business and having to find an antidote, you take care of all of these and it will happen naturally - that the best things in your business will flow, you will get good karma in your business. Therefore you will have money or leisure. Therefore you will be able to do compassionate acts, help other people with this, either the money or the leisure that you have.

Interviewer: You’ve had this for a while haven’t you, since you were in Tinvale?

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: How did you find it translating these 10 principles into actual business practice? How did it go living up to these principles?

Kacy: I have it there sitting beside my computer and when I speak to people on the phone it would be there to remind me. Constant reminder. A lot of these things I do anyway because I worked on a successful business. So I did it before I was a Buddhist especially financial commitment. I was always high on my list about paying everybody before you pay yourself. Don’t go into debt if there’s no finance. That one is from my first business when I had some financial trouble ...
as a commercial photographer where I would get paid for 6-8 months. So it was difficult for me to live let alone keep my business going.

Interviewer: So were these [principles] reinforcements then?

Kacy: Yes they were but a whole lot of them were new for example the speaking ones. In my early business, perhaps I was insecure and I hadn’t mature a lot as a person. I hadn’t met the dharma at that time. I was quite ego-driven in terms of I’m the top person, and, you know, having a big list of jobs and all of that kind of stuff. And all of that is written such to bring that into check ... a little bit.

Interviewer: So that started bringing your ego into check which was rather inflated.

Kacy: Yes, and most people in business are. That’s what gives you that big drive ... run harder and faster.

Interviewer: I sense that you struggled on some of them?

Kacy: I still ... still remind myself all the time. And this one (Principle 9) also ego related because it’s so easy to be jealous of other people – you want what they’ve got, particularly, I don’t know, it is a bit of a Western thing this, if somebody is doing well ... you make yourself feel bad about it: “Oh, they’re doing well, so I mustn’t be very good.” I remember His Holiness saying that that was a really perverse Western thinking ... a sense of insecurity in there ... twisted logic that makes no sense but is a strong one in our society. And this one is quite counterproductive and that’s why there’s so much depression in our society as well.

Interviewer: These things can prevent cooperation for example the one about celebrating people’s achievement.

Kacy: This one for me is ... if somebody around you, or somebody in competition with you, wins something or get an award or something really nice happens to them, and you say, “Great, they got!” but you don’t really mean it ... because you think you should have got it. So there is a negativity in there because you are actually, slightly wishing them harm, even though you’re saying, “Fantastic, they got it,” slightly you’re actually wishing them harm because you wished you’d got it. That’s subtle negative karma.

Interviewer: Quite difficult that one. Imagine if you could celebrate other people’s achievements as if they were your own, then you would be celebrating all the time! Wouldn’t that be great?

Kacy: I hadn’t thought about it like that. So that one, for example, I’d often still catch myself saying, “Well, that’s fantastic.” Then this little sneaky thing comes into your mind, you know, that little negative. And I actually have to stop and sort of have to really imagine that person and say ... send them some light and say,
‘Fantastic.’ So I have to do a little ritual to overcome that sneaky, that little thing. For example, so and so wins a contract, that I think I should’ve got. And I think, “Well, good for them!” and then this little darty thing comes in: “How come I didn’t get it,” you know. So if you catch yourself doing that, then I’d imagine those people and try and send them some white light.

Interviewer: The white light symbolises what?

Kacy: Goodwill, compassion ... It is like a little ritual about, “I don’t feel well about these people. So I’m going to do a practice here. Even if I don’t really feel it, I am still going to do this practice about feeling well.” And so it is all about practice.

Interviewer: I think that’s very good because those things can gnaw at you and build up if you’re not careful and after 20 years you become a very jealous individual.

Kacy: Or anxious. And I’ve had a bit of anxiety, you know when I was a bit mad with menopause. How that came out was being anxious ... so an anxiety that was not good enough or to me it was a nameless thing as if the whole universe was going to collapse. But these two [contentment, being in the moment and being open] they really tie in with the whole of the metaphysical things we were talking about in Buddhism. Doing these it’s like your mind going ‘Click’ ... it opens you up to a whole load of other dimensions that you wouldn’t ordinarily imagine.

Interviewer: I would say that you’ve opened up ... much more open to the possibilities now after many years of being close to this.

Kacy: Yes. I’d always thought that I ran my business on ethical principles in terms of social justice and not consuming, recycling etc. but this shifted it away from just those straight environmental views to a spiritual dimension. So it did that. And then ... just when you were talking about this and you were saying how this manifested. Perhaps it has manifested in the fact that here I am now ... the fact that I can live in a beautiful place ... I’m getting enough work ... I have the leisure now to do more study and also do my volunteer things. So perhaps you can say that has occurred, the karma has happened to me at this stage in my life may have occurred because I was doing this. That’s what the teachers would say. Don’t know, hadn’t thought about it. When you said that I thought maybe the fact that I’m able to do this because other people can’t when they come here. There’s no work. This is a tourist town and I just thought ... and this new resort started and they hired me to do that.

Interviewer: How much work are you doing at the moment in terms of hours?

Kacy: It comes and goes as freelance. What I’d like to do is 2-3 days a week. Some months is nothing like December and January there’s no work but until then I had a bit of work. But you see I don’t need a lot now to stay alive ... to run a car, run a phone ... that’s it.
Interviewer: Pay the mortgage? Do you have a mortgage?

Kacy: Yes a small mortgage now but Jane [the tenant living below] is helping out – she pays rent. I can live fairly simply. I also get paid a lot an hour so I don't need to do much hours.

Interviewer: If this continues like this will you be OK?

Kacy: I'll be OK. I have to trust because it is very up and down. Because I made the decision that I didn't want to do the work like I did before. Before I did a lot of travelling all over Australia. I just want to work locally. So I'm not pursuing the work I did before in Manning and Jackson etc. I'm doing little bit of work with local councils and in just a little office now compared to in Tinvale where I had full staff. I had big mortgage and that kind of stuff, company car and everything. So the money I earn most of it is mine rather than ... $12,000 of income a month went out before we the two directors could pay ourselves wages. There was the staff wages, the mortgage, the cars, all the insurances, the phones, the land taxes ... $12,000 a month before she, the other business partner, and I could draw a wage. Now, if I make 2,000 a month ... I’m fine [ecstatic expression]!

Interviewer: Are you happier with this arrangement?

Kacy: Gosh, I am [laughter and grateful expression} ... because I was always worried about paying my staff bills, paying myself later. Because they rely on me: they have families and they had to get paid first.

Part 6 (19 March 2005)
We go to office where there are some yellow notes on the wall. I ask her to read some of them and explain their meaning.

Kacy: This is a reminder to do Tonglen. The idea is that you do Tonglen ... you’re suppose to get into the habit so you can do it all the time, like for example, when you’re in a shopping centre and you see somebody who is actually suffering e.g. somebody limping, or a mother dealing with a kid who’s screaming or something like that. It’s just so that you can actually do the practice right then by actually taking on their suffering, extinguish it and breathing out compassionate light. It says, ‘May I give all my good to others and take all their suffering on myself.’ And you do it on the breath. Suffering in, imagine it as black smoke, extinguish in your heart, breathe it out as white light. And saying there’s a person who’s suffering and she hasn’t got much money by the looks of it. Kids screaming. Let me take on her pain, and you breathe in black smoke and you breathe it out as white light. That’s the idea that when you are highly practiced you can do it all the time. So this is to remind me to do it when I can think of it. All these techniques are powerful ways of transforming our own minds.

She disappears and comes back with the book The Diamond Cutter by Michael Roach.
Kacy: What they’re saying in the Diamond Sutra and what this teacher is saying is if you practice all of these what you’re actually doing is – I’m just reminding myself by looking at the text – you’re planting imprints in your mind to see the world in a different way. ‘To see yourself doing that well in business, you have to implant things about being generous in your mind. To see the world as a happy place you have to put the imprints in for leading an ethical life.’ So in other words, doing this you’re creating imprints in your mind that then changes reality. The imprints cause us to see another world. In other words, the Buddha said that with our thoughts we create the world. So he is saying, if we do all of these things, what we’re actually doing is putting these imprints in so that when they ripened, the world will be a different place. The world will be a safer place, people will be kinder, we will be able to live in a place where there is no war because we have created that reality by acting in this manner.

Interviewer: I don’t quite understand what you mean by imprints.

Kacy: Imprint means … on our stream of consciousness, by doing this kind of action, the imprint is what ripens, in karma. It is sort of like, if we plant a seed of generosity in our mind stream by practicing generosity, the imprint is what actually ripens into the next karma when it comes out. So in some seeds, there are either positive seeds or negative seeds or neutral seeds that ripen into the karma. It is a metaphor but that is what they’re talking about in what karma arises from is an imprint. And they usually describe it as positive, negative or neutral. For example they say here, ‘In order to see yourself get all that you ever wish for or see others get all they ever wish for, you plant the imprint by cultivating compassion toward others.’ So if you continually and knowingly act compassionately, the world that will come to you will be a world of generosity. In other words, nice things will happen to you and nice things will happen to other people.

Interviewer: Is the author of the book a monk?

Kacy: Yes.

Interviewer: He is very innovative. He must have done a lot of business before.

Kacy: He actually works in business. His teacher – he did a Geshe degree – he is obviously a reincarnate born in the West. There are many strange examples in the book. Here for example, as you’re becoming successful and all of that you’re getting all these health problems. The solution is go back and look at all the people in your company and your staff, and every one of their condition is working for their health e.g. lighting, chair, working hours. So by taking care of all the well-being of your staff, your health problems will be alleviated.

Interviewer: Did you do that?
Kacy: Umm ... [long pause] yeah but I had to leave before my health problems got better because of the stress situation with my business partner. Yes, I did do that.

Interviewer: Did you ...?

Kacy: Yes I did because I was looking at this, with this book, underlying this ...

Interviewer: Getting them to have a better well-being? In what way?

Kacy: In what way? Um ... With Louise, who was a working mother, I’d always let her work totally her own hours ... because she had five children. I would encourage her to work at home if she could. I would, on a physical thing, I made sure ... I went out and actually bought her a new chair because the old one wasn’t good enough. So these were the direct things probably because of me underlining these things. I put an air-conditioner in because where she was working used to get the afternoon sun and she really suffered. So I did that ... all of the result of this. With Michele, she was a student doing a PhD, and I made sure she had the study time she needed. She was difficult to work with though – I got a lot of practice of her.

Interviewer: We need this kind of book especially how ruthless businesses are.

Kacy: Mind you, with that ‘Maintain true impressions’ (Principle 4), the problem if you don’t do that, being absolutely truthful in your word, the problem is that people around you never believe what you say even though you’re telling the truth. So what is the solution? The solution is actually something you’re doing in yourself. You have to be really accurate in the word.

Interviewer: OK, that’s very good.

Correspondence

E-mail 2 January 2007, in reply to my New Year wishes.
Thank you for your wishes. And I wish you all joy for 2007.

Life is calm and peaceful here; the last two weeks, Christmas time, in Australia are a time for mass consumerism, over indulgence and over consumption. We just try and have a happy family time and ignore all the rest.

Hope you are well; did you get the PhD done?

My practice is consistent, but every time I sit on that stool in the mornings, it is still with absolute beginners mind. Think my whole life will be learning how to focus on the breath.
I have had a love in my life for a year now, Taylor is a doctor who works in mental health and drugs, is a meditator and a dharma student as well. It is both a rare gift to have a dharma friend as a partner, and challenge!

Still living at the beach ...

I hope to meet up with you one day soon.

**Written Articles**

*These are samples of articles Kacy has written for a local newspaper. They are mainly about the environment not Buddhism and hence not particularly relevant to this research. However, they reflect clearly her concern for social justice and community participation.*

**Looking back, looking forward**

Ongoing debates about Shire amalgamation, confusion over proposed heritage legislation, plus the hip-pocket focus of the electoral campaign have raised again, for me, some of the big questions.

In particular, predictions of a south-eastern megacity, from Mallory to the Maine, have me asking – is this concrete-based future inevitable?

Can we not, somehow, have some say in how we, and future generations, choose to live?

The key is, I think, not to seek for answers, to wait for certainty, before we are mobilised out of our (me first) comfort zones.

Take the push for sustainable development, and my particular interest, sustainable tourism. Tourism is Mallory’s biggest economic driver, and there is a commitment, by some, to pursue sustainable tourism, with a particular focus on nature and heritage based tourism.

Sustainable tourism is a way of thinking and doing business that aims to deliver environmental, economic and social benefits to the community, while safeguarding natural environments and cultural heritage.

A lofty, yet desirable aim. But most of us realize that business as usual is only going to fast track us “to hell in a handcart.”

I have been monitoring community feedback about the proposed amalgamation. And heartened to note how many are passionate about the qualities of life in Mallory – the beaches, bush, wildlife, the river, a backdrop of history, a sense of place.
But these wonderful attributes can only be maintained if we embrace the uncertainty of ‘sustainability’ and work to develop other, ‘outside the square’ ways to meet pressing human needs.

So what does this all have to do with heritage? Everything!

Chate-based Judy Thomas, a passionate worker for Mallory’s heritage, likes to use this (unattributed) quote to get people thinking… “If what we pass through today is history, what we leave behind for others is heritage.”

Battles to preserve our environmental and cultural heritage will be in vain in the long term, unless issues of affordable housing, jobs, public transport, education and community support are addressed.

This won’t happen if we leave it to those we elect, or to those who are concerned more with profit and power than quality of life.

So thank you to all those folk working behind the scenes on these pressing social issues. They might be surprised to think they are, in their own ways, working for sustainability.

Considered together, they are, we are, a huge and courageous force for change.

**Earth challenges**

Most of us travel in order to return, for a shift in perspective. Coming up is the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and I was in Japan for a workshop on sustainable education tools.

This UN Decade is responding to escalating global crisis on climate change, water management, environmental conservation, health, sustainable production and consumption, human rights, peace and international understanding. And underpinning all this is getting rid of poverty and creating equal opportunities for women.

Yep – the whole catastrophe! Humanity is, truly, living in interesting times. What struck me, in talking with colleagues from ‘less developed’ countries, was the contrast in challenges.

Their challenges are about meeting basic needs of food, water, and health for many in nations where the actions of governments and big business are often less than transparent.

I feel our main obstacle to ‘thinking and doing’ more sustainably is more to do with holding on to what we have; a kind of selfish, fearful complacency that blinds us.
This stifles creativity and cooperation, and makes us easily manipulated – as played out daily in the election campaigns. Are interest rates and terrorists what matters most? I feel diminished by such assumptions by our ‘leaders’.

On my return, sideways during a conversation on heritage, I shared these thoughts with a friend. She responded with:

“Though we may live in different environments, with different ways of seeing the world and priorities, we all face the same basic challenge of realising our ambitions without destroying the resources of future generations. The change in lifestyle must evolve deep in the hearts of people responding to the elemental vision of life - to live by the ethic that the Earth is indeed One.” Anne-Maree Fewtrell.

As Japanese students at the UNESCO workshop put it:
“Sustainable means to continue. Development means thinking about the environment, and to open our minds to think about it.” Midori Takemoto, 14 years.
“Why do we kids have to fix a planet destroyed by adults?” Yuichi Morimoto, 13 years.

Before I left, I visited Hiroshima where some 200,000 people were killed by an action purporting to halt the war. That action can also be interpreted as an abominable unnecessary nuclear experiment to intimidate the Soviets and influence the balance of world power. Such unimaginable suffering, I resolved to try and keep some perspective whenever I ‘sweat the small stuff’ in my life.

Field notes

8 December 2004
At Ma Maison café at Tinvale. Cold windy, rainy day.
• Kacy sat diagonally opposite me next to Amy on other side. She was middle-age and appeared friendly and interested in what I was doing
• Drank one small light beer saying this was her usual – meaning only one or only a little. I was slightly taken aback with this for some reason – may be should take it up with her especially on Tibetan tradition
• She lives alone in Mallory, sometimes has single tenant living I think below the house.
• She has a cat which she keeps company and seems to adore it. She may be somewhat lonely at times there? Can follow up on dealing with loneliness.
• Used to have a media company that does jobs nationwide with a number of staff. Now on her own, no staff and works part time. She says she is more happy now than before and should have done it 5 years ago (now only been 1.5 years since moving from Tinvale to Mallory). She says only thing she misses in Tinvale is a few friends.
• Her house overlooks (next to) rainforest of national park and is 10 minutes walk to the beach.
• She is part of Tibetan Buddhist community and has lots of friends who she would be willing to introduce. She goes to study dharma there often and says that without the change of lifestyle would not have been able to do so.
• She has done vipassana retreat at Chate before and found it hard – especially not being able to exercise like she usually does. She says Tibetan meditative retreat is easier since they break up with mantra and prayers.
• She meditates every day (mainly mantra meditation) but only for a short time – she finds it hard and has to make herself do it. I agreed with her on this and say that I think it is the same for everyone.
• Kacy did her Master degree – don’t know what topic.
• Kacy also seems to be quite familiar with Middle Eastern food and converse well with others.

17th March 2005
Thursday evening – arrival day at her house
• Arrived at 5.45pm after good trip listening to dharma and being mindful. A little tired by OK.
• Nice simple house but quite big with deck at back overlooking vast expanse of national park. Cloudy but nice lights at sunset.
• Kacy has a tenant below, so she feels less guilty about 1 person having such a big house – she bought it for the view.
• Met the cat, a big Burmese-mongrel cross, with a coarse voice. He is old.
• Kacy was doing a big clean of her house. She was nice but seemed somewhat aloof at first. Reminds me of another person I thought about interviewing.
• I put my stuff in the pleasant blue, small room with wooden blinds. Then I went to the deck where we had tea and had informal chat.
• Kacy had just returned from a city where they had a good trip with her family and friends to celebrate her birthday. They hiked and stayed at youth hostels and drank too much wine, etc. But she felt there were too many tourists. She disliked the idea of sustainable tourism which she felt was an oxymoron.
• She remarked that there were many things in Tibetan Buddhism that seem unbelievable or illogical to her Western scientific mind – she has a bachelor in biology. But she now puts these aside – may be it is beyond her understanding or not for her times. She mentions also that most of these teaching seems so true in her experience and therefore what seems strange she is willing to put aside or consider the possibility.
• In the kitchen she recounts a story of her ‘fierce’ friend who was a professional chef in Hong Kong and a strict Buddhist. She has been scolded by him for having food out and ants coming to eat and therefore drowning in the soaked dishes that have not been washed. This is an unmindful act – leaving food unwashed.
• In the kitchen she is very careful not to kill the ants. One time, they came on the chopping board after dinner. I had to blow them away but to no avail, so I left the dishes out on the deck overnight.
• Today is a special day and she receives a lot of phone calls. She acknowledged good support and relationship with family, especially sisters, and friends.
• On the deck the moon was beautiful with halo, and the sound of ocean thundering in the night. I remarked about the beauty and she said how lucky she was: “Beautiful place to live in, family, friends, dharma and ocean.”
• She also remarked “This society is about what you haven’t got” instead of “What you have.” Rightly so I said.

18th March 2005
• Helped her with indicators work and gave her some files
• Breakfast was simple of organic yoghurt and fruits. I also had brought some bread and tea from home.
• We were leaving for the committee meeting on Piedmont sustainable tourism indicators. Before we left she showed me:
  1. the section on Dalai Lama book ‘Many Paths to Nirvana’ on what I suggested about being spiritually strong first to face or engage in world. She seemed to really agree, now with Dalai Lama’s blessing
  2. the things to consider before going to work – these came from Institute of Enlightened Business. She looks at it every time before going out. I will follow up on this.
• I attended the meeting with because I had done a thesis on sustainable indicators. The committee were novices – they really knew nothing about indicators and the enormity of even small projects like theirs. I did my best to suggest things but I doubt whether they could get very far. I told Kacy this later on.
• On return journey she mentioned how she was uncomfortable with being a board member and also her dislike of local politicians and business interest groups. She said 2 councillors were stupid. She also disliked a business operator for Piedmont who was tough bully.
• How does she deal with him I asked. She sits and only speaks when she’s comfortable. She’s waiting to get stronger and know what to say, just not arguing.
• She has read Diamond Cutter by Geshe Michael Roach on business ethics and Buddhism. She is trying hard obviously. She shows many pages from it.
• We had dinner at Mark’s place (her friend) nearby and some others join. I bought some fruits for them. It was very pleasant and the people were very nice. I had some interesting conversation.

19th March 2005 (Leaving Kacy’s house today)
• We went to Mark’s place again late in the morning. Mark was joined by his about to be divorced girlfriend of nearly 60 years old, a very rich Melbournian who lived nearby in a multimillion dollar house close by. Mark’s place was just a little 2 storey townhouse but quite nice.
• We all 4 went for a swim and it was very nice. Kacy went off with Mark’s girlfriend for a long swim out in the oceans. I stayed nearer the beach with Mark. Then I forgot the boogie board at the shower and Mark never found it.
• After a deliciously simple lunch which we used the vegetable from Kacy and those I brought with my bread, Kacy decided fairly abruptly to leave (we only had just finished lunch). I was a little surprised though quite happy to be getting going. Kacy later told me in the car that she a little annoyed or at least
felt sticky about being around Mark over the last few days (she sees him nearly every day). She dislikes his indecisive nature (e.g. buying the car took him ages and still hadn’t decided) and he was fussy and worried too much when people came to visit him. This was too much for her.

• However, later on in the house she phoned Mark to say thank you for a nice lunch. She explained to me that she felt a strong awareness of the fuzzy feeling inside that did not appreciate Mark. So she was mindful of this and acted to make sure her relationship with Mark would not suffer. She explained that Mark would have felt this and so the call put everything back in order and to let him know that he was appreciated.

• On leaving she thanked me very sincerely and said, “Thank you for bringing this into my life.” I felt very good and was a little sad to leave. The cat had disappeared into his den and could not be found and so I did get to see him. I had felt being part of her family, friend and inner circle, and I deeply appreciated what she had heartedly shared with me. I thought it would be nice to visit again (she offered several times) but somehow felt that I might not see this house again.
Interview

Part 1 (28 July 2005) – Translated from Thai

Interviewer: Why did you take an interest in Buddhism in the very beginning?

Rae: Then, I was in my fourth year studying for a bachelor degree. I had some problems in my life like most teenagers. I had broken hearts and those sorts of things and so I felt that I was suffering a lot at the time. One time, my girlfriend left me for another guy. She just didn’t want me anymore. I felt terrible. I didn’t want to see anyone. I didn’t want to eat or sleep. I was devastated and I felt I had lost everything. Life held no meaning for me … I was sick of it. But, in general, during those years my mind was in a state of suffering. But I didn’t know what to do. One day I was walking around in a bookstore and I found a book by Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. It was a small booklet with only a few summary pages. The title of the book was called ‘Why are we born?’ So that caught my attention and I repeated the title to myself in my mind, “Why are we born?” and began to read it. Buddhadasa asked whether the only purpose of being born was to eat, procreate and build reputation. In fact, human beings deserve something that is better than these, and that’s living without suffering. According to Buddhism this is the highest achievement possible for human beings: living without suffering. When I read that book - in fact I didn’t buy the book because I just read it in the bookstore since there were only a few pages – I felt as if there was a way out. From then on I began to take an interest in Buddhism ... from that point on.

Interviewer: What did you do once you became interested?

Rae: When I became interested I started to find dharma books. I read books by Buddhadasa which there were some already at my home. I began to read them but the one book that paid particular attention to was ‘Handbook for Mankind.’ As I read it I began to try meditation in various ways.

Interviewer: By yourself?

Rae: Yes, by myself. In the beginning there was a lot of misunderstanding so much so that I found myself into a group that was pre-occupied with spirits and devas [angels]. And I was fascinated and had fun with that for some time because I thought ... did not know that there was another path. I did not understand much. I spent a lot of time there with that group ... years in fact. But the more I was with the group the more I saw the way the members behaved. There was a lot of jealousy, squabbling, internal strive and people competed to show how rich they were ... lots of these kinds of things. At ceremonies they competed to be a part of these and when there was merit-making everyone
competed again as if attempting to gain face for themselves. As I stayed on I felt that this was probably not the way to go. This group was too bizarre and so I got out.

Interviewer: So you went into this group because?

Rae: I had great misunderstanding.

Interviewer: Why did you get into this group?

Rae: Then I didn’t know. That group had lots of things that was supernatural. I was interested because there was lots of strange things like ... cure for diseases and so on, talks on spirits and ghosts and devas ... things that I had never known about before. Therefore I was interested in those things and wanted to explore them. But then, as I said, when I got in and found those things I had to escape from the group.

Interviewer: What age were you then?

Rae: I was studying for my bachelor degree ... it was year B.E. 2531 ... I was 23 ... around 23.

Interviewer: And you were there for years.

Rae: Yes, for years.

Interviewer: And the dharma books?

Rae: Yes I kept reading them concurrently. I kept reading them while with the group. And I saw also that that didn’t help me much.

Interviewer: And after you saw that that group was not the way what did you do?

Rae: I came and talked with one of the professors here. He had taught me during my fourth year and had been my project advisor. We talked about dharma and he said he knew a monk whose name was Luang Pu Jieng. In fact, the previous Vice-Chancellor was a disciple of Luang Pu Jieng and when there was something he would ask my professor to help out, for example electrical jobs such as wiring the temple, system fixes and so on ... he would help out. He told me stories of the supernatural and so I was partly interested because of that, and so I went and saw him. I was going to see him to learn how to practice dharma. So I started learning with Luang Pu Jieng beginning around B.E. 2531 ... at the end of B.E. 2531. So I started learning.

Interviewer: Where was he living?

Rae: He was at Hin Gon in Saraburi but he has since passed away. Luang Pu Jieng taught me meditation but it emphasised samatha. He taught how to
practice samatha ... how to do as he did. So I did that until he passed away in B.E. 2542.

Interviewer: Was that using ‘Buddho’?

Rae: I tried every method. I tried every one of them. This is because I couldn’t do any of them so I had to try. I couldn’t concentrate on the air movement. I attempted to concentrate on objects using foam cut out into a circle but couldn’t do that. My mind wasn’t still; it wasn’t at peace at all. So I tried every technique ... anything that came across I tried them all, but my mind would not stay focused. There was only a state of ceaseless wandering mind or I would fall asleep. There were only these two states: wandering mind or falling asleep. But I practiced everyday.

Interviewer: Everyday?

Rae: Everyday. And I went to see Luang Pu Jieng every week. At first he would come to teach close to here and I went to listen to his talk everyday. So he taught and talked about this and that. So it was like adjusting my viewpoint so that it was heading toward right understanding on many things. But still I could not do concentrative meditation right until his death ... I still couldn’t do it ... from B.E. 2531 to 2542.

Interviewer: Training everyday.

Rae: When I didn’t meditate for one day I would feel as if there was some thing missing ... like someone who had an illness and had missed taking prescribed pills. But while sitting meditating I knew that there was no stillness yet I felt it was something I had to do.

Interviewer: Though I feel that you gained some insight on dharma.

Rae: I got quite a few basic insights that I could use in daily life.

Interviewer: Like what?

Rae: He taught me principles such as forgiveness and others ... the basics and other issues. For example, he taught about reacting to criticism: if somebody criticises you then that is better than hitting you. And again you should think that if somebody hits you then that is better than killing you. If somebody kills you then you should think, “Good that is karmic fruition and that’s the end of that once and for all.” So he taught many things about looking at the world in a positive manner. So it was about changing points of view. So I could apply them in daily life quite often. In truth, he also taught about mindfulness development but I didn’t understand the principle. But sometime I would see it when I was angry ... when I was angry I sometime saw the anger. There was a time I noticed that when anger arises it arises very quickly ... a sudden ‘whoosh’ would quickly turn into anger, but when anger ceased it faded away only slowly until it would
suddenly disappear. So I saw the nature of anger in the mind like that. When I saw that, anger would be much more subdued than before. As a result of seeing anger arising and ceasing I would hardly ever get angry with anybody - only just minor irritation and frustration but not anger that would result in temper and harsh speech. But I did not understand that much then, only saw the nature of anger.

Interviewer: When you said you see anger? When did you see it?

Rae: During daily life ... like walking around.

Interviewer: Not when you were practicing samatha?

Rae: No, during my normal work. When I was working there were meetings, arguments and so on ... and sometime I would get angry, my mind would get angry. So I would see it.

Interviewer: So you saw even though Luang Pu did not teach you?

Rae: Yes he didn’t teach me. I saw it by myself.

Interviewer: Were you curious why this happened?

Rae: No, I was not curious. I just saw some phenomenon and it was able to change the state of my mind. I just saw that at the beginning. This is one point.

Interviewer: That’s quite strange that you were able to do it without anyone teaching. Did you read books?

Rae: Yes I read but just general books, teachings ... on contemplation, on defilements and so on ... so I knew a lot of those things, but I never really saw the actual state of my mind that was filled with anger ... those sorts of things. So when I saw it then it caused my mind to change at least at one level.

Interviewer: Do you remember what was it like the first time you saw it?

Rae: I saw it as I told you. Saw anger ... when it arises it arises really quickly just like lighting a match: anger will burst into flame and then after a while it will flicker and die down, smaller and smaller and as it’s about to extinguish it’s sudden put out. I saw it like that, the characteristics.

Interviewer: And after that did you see it regularly?

Rae: No I didn’t see it [laugh]. I saw it clearly only one time but I can remember it well. Can remember it well.

Interviewer: What did you do after Luang Pu died?
Rae: At the latter stages before Luang Pu died I started practicing *vipassana* but at first I also misunderstood it. I thought that *vipassana* was about sitting to contemplate on dharma concepts. So I sat and thought about these just like in any worldly subject, like five aggregates is like this and that. I just sat and analysed and thought about them. I thought that that was *vipassana*. But I misunderstood. After Luang Pu Jieng died I just continued like that. Just get going, thinking, analysing dharma. After a while the professor who I talked about earlier that told me about Luang Pu Jieng ... he also went to learn with Luang Pu Jieng ... was learning *bhavana*. The professor was teaching people meditation and I went and studied with him and also another teacher who Luang Pu had told me was an able teacher. But again during learning I was not able to do it because I was taught to create visions (*nimitr*), to use imagination to create visions, to concentrate on visions ... all are ways of *samatha*. So I couldn’t do it. So what did I do when I couldn’t do it? Just sat there and did what I could. Later I used the internet and I discovered a website call ‘Dharmacom’ and I saw articles by Luang Por Asoke who was then using the name Dhammadasa. So I read them and thought this was a strange way of teaching. But as I read it I felt this might be practice that I could actually do – I just felt that after looking for so long. After reading the articles for I while I decided to email questions to him and told him that this was how I was practicing. I he replied that what I’d been doing was wrong ... it was practice that was based on desire, but desire was the cause of suffering and to use desire to end suffering was impossible. They way should be to follow things that happen ... whatever is happening in the body, just to know and acknowledge them.

Interviewer: When was that? Which year?

Rae: Around beginning of B.E. 2543 or around end of 2542 ... that I emailed to him. Before I emailed to him very often I would have a very heavy sensation ... feels really heavy.

Interviewer: During sitting meditation?

Rae: No all day long, because I was practicing fixation and those sorts of things ... practicing things that were incorrect a lot. So I felt as if my head was really heavy and my chest and body too ... heavy. When I finished reading the email I was quite astonished, “Have I been doing it wrong all this time?” OK, I didn’t care much if I was wrong. Wrong is wrong. So when I finished reading I walked down all the way from the fourth floor of my office to go to the cafeteria. Then I suddenly realised, “Why do I feel light now? My mind is light, that was once heavy where has it all gone?”

Interviewer: Just when you read that mail?

Rae: Yes, when he said that it was wrong. So because it was wrong I stopped doing it. I stopped the fixation, the analysis and so on and just walked normally. Just didn’t do anything. I was walking like a normal person. I discovered that the heaviness was gone and the mind felt happier, more joyful. I was beginning to
see something. But I could only do that for a while and then it returned to the original state again. Fixation and analysis again.

Interviewer: I didn’t understand why you were analysing?

Rae: I got it wrong about practice so I would analyse things like the five aggregates. Just thinking about things to study for example thinking about rupa the first aggregate, what is it like ... but that was not really vipassana at all. It was just a preliminary understanding, like reading an ordinary book. You just read and follow the thinking. So when I went back to the original heavy state I just had enough – it was looking ominous. I found out that he was visiting Larnna House and so I went there to learn, around February B.E. 2543. When I met him I introduced myself and said I was the one who had sent the mail. The first time he saw me he nodded and said, “You don’t know how to be aware of self yet. Start being aware.” So he began to teach at that place. And I was still doing fixation and analysis, and he would point out to me that those things I saw or did that wasn’t it. He would point out to me when I was doing things wrong, at the specific point. So I did that. And then after that I went and saw him from time to time.

Interviewer: Was he a layperson then?

Rae: Yes. Did that for about three months. I had a friend who asked for a meeting with him in the evening which was unusual because he didn’t receive guests usually. So I met him at Jusco department store. He’d already arrived and was having dinner. And I was just walking as normal without doing anything ... wasn’t thinking about practice, nothing ... just walking normally. I walked to him and when I arrived he nodded and said, “Now you know what it’s like to have awareness.” I was puzzled, “Oh is it like this? Wasn’t doing anything.” It was the reverse of everything I’d known. Total reverse. Before I felt that I had to do this and that, coerce the mind to do things, learn this and that, but it wasn’t any of those. But when I just let it be it was the right state of mind, and so I was puzzled. So I had to spend months more before I understood what awareness was like. And when I understood what being aware was then he told me to practice the four foundations of mindfulness but he told me to go and find out how to do this myself. I didn’t know ... didn’t know. So I began to read but didn’t know how to do it in reality. But I didn’t care too much. I just did the same thing I was told in daily life ... just trying to cultivate awareness of self, to observe myself. I still met him from time to time.

Interviewer: Did you meet often?

Rae: About once a month, no more than twice a month ... at Larnna House or at his office during lunch, learning while we were eating. I went with a friend who asked many questions and he taught a lot but with me he didn’t say much. He was just watching. When I had awareness he would nod and that would mean things were OK and we could continue practicing. When our mind wandered and lost awareness he would tell us what we’d done and that that state was not it. So I just remembered what state of mind was correct and what state was not correct.
Just tried to remember, so I could learn when I was on my own ... when I became fixated and so on. This was the way I did it: *doo chit [observing mind]* on and on, according to the way he taught us.

**Interview: How did observing impact your life?**

**Rae:** At the beginning there was no change ... no real change. I was carrying on my life. My perspective of the world was the same, not much different really.

**Interviewer:** Then why were you so sure that this was the right way forward?

**Rae:** I was not sure in the beginning [laugh]. It was quite usual for people not to be sure. As I went along doing it I was also thinking, “Will this work? Will it be good?” Doubt will come up frequently and all I could do was tell myself that I’ve done other techniques for over ten years and it hadn’t work and so even if I try this method another ten years that wouldn’t matter. I was consoling myself. I kept trying and trying.

**Interviewer:** So what happened as you tried?

**Rae:** At first I really wondered how well I was doing, how good was the practice. Every time I saw my teacher he just smiled and nodded, and taught a little bit. I also relied on his teaching to other people. I continued observing the mind (*doo chit*) until one day I was waiting for my wife to take her home. I had just gone to a meeting because I was a member of committee for academic standards and so I’d just had a meeting. That afternoon, I came back to teach a class and I was tired by the evening. So I was sitting there resting and waiting. As soon as I sat down I closed my eyes and tried to rest. I was not thinking about practice at all. But suddenly words sprang to my mind, a rhetorical statement, “The feeling of self ...” because back then while I was practicing I would have the feeling of selfhood quite often that ‘I’ was doing this and that or ‘I’ was this and that. Then the words came out: “You don’t need to destroy the feeling of selfhood. All you have to do is destroy the wrong view of self and *sotapanna* [the first stage of enlightenment] can be attained.” That’s what my mind was saying. Then suddenly the mind became one ... whoop! ... and achieved a state that I’d never encountered before. After it became one only a little while it came back out, and there was a retrospection which lead to an understanding: “This is the state of nirvana. It’s the mind that only knows nirvana and doesn’t go and taste any other states of greed [*lobha*], hate [*dosa*] and delusion [*moha*]. It will only experience the state of nirvana.” That’s what the mind was expressing. “Practice is just this. It’s about cultivating *sati* [mindfulness]. Everything else is not the path. The only path is cultivating *sati*. There are still many defilements that I have to rid myself and there’s a lot of work left.” So I was able to contemplate these main aspects. After it happened I was curious at what had happened – what happened to me? I didn’t understand. So I went to research in all the books, anything that I had at home I looked at them all, but I could not find any description of this state! Didn’t find it. So I was puzzled for many days and decided to email my teacher to ask because that was during period when I hadn’t seen him much. So I described in
my email that so and so happened, and asked him whether this kind of experience was one of renouncing self-view and if somebody had this experience whether they would know what had happened. He replied that many people who are knocking at the door of the stages of enlightenment don’t know where there’re at. Only people who have studied a lot, know a lot, can understand. But many just don’t know. And he told me that the experience that I had sounds like it but I would have to meet in him in person to confirm it. And if it was so then I could feel relief and if not then I’ll have to continue. So I went to see him and he nodded and smiled, and that was the confirmation - we both understood. Then he taught me to continue observation (doo chit).

Interview: What was the experience like again as you can best describe it.

Rae: It was like the mind suddenly at that point ‘whooped’ down and then it brightened again inside, something like that ... like I was in another world or another dimension, another state of existence that was not normal or as we usually are. Then it emerged back up. That was it - very short, not long time at all.

Interviewer: But there was no perturbation of the mind?

Rae: Hard to tell, it was so quick ... so quick and I wasn’t able to remember the details. I can just remember the state of the mind when it went down there. Then after the episode my mind began to change. It was very peaceful and still for about two weeks. Unbelievably, there were no defilements (kilesi) at all, like lust just completely disappeared from life. I felt that it was a life that was incredibly happy - there was no suffering (dukkha) at all. It didn’t matter what happened to me, anything at all, I was totally at peace. It lasted about two weeks and then things began to get back to what it was before ... like a normal person again and I began to feel this and that and so on. After that I began to understand the dharma more and more. Before I was unable to answer any questions on dharma but gradually I was able to reply to questions people might ask – I could answer them that this was so and so.

Interviewer: Can you explain what it was like during those two weeks? What was the happiness like?

Rae: My life was going on as usual but I didn’t feel any bother or feel unhappy or affected by anything from the outside. I didn’t feel any suffering or stress or any those sorts of things at all. It was a state of existence that was light and easy. All the defilements ... like if I saw a beautiful woman I wouldn’t feel anything. I saw it as just the way things are – just normal.

Interviewer: Before did you react?

Rae: Before ... even now I would react, have feelings, let alone before. Even now I would react. But during those two weeks, however pretty the women were walking around I wouldn’t react at all. If somebody came and said something or if
during work something negative happened - before frustration would set in or I’d be annoyed or displeased - but back then I wouldn’t react to any of these things. Just looked at it as normality. Just continued working as if nothing had happened. Whether other people agreed or not I didn’t react negatively or positively. I just did my duty. It was a period in my life that was quite strange. But it only lasted two weeks.

Interviewer: Were you puzzled why this happened?

Rae: No, I was not puzzled about it. The mind was just continuing to observe following things that happened. The sati was very sharp and very solid. It would not get caught up in emotions or anything.

Interviewer: If anything came in what would it [sati] do?

Rae: It would know and be equanimous immediately. It would not go and grasp it or mess with it. It was very quick. And as for self-awareness ... normally I would often lose myself by not being mindful or I would be daydreaming all the time, that was all gone.

Interviewer: Even though back then did you have a family already?

Rae: Yes and I was working full time.

Interviewer: So there were a lot things going on.

Rae: Yes, just like normal. I did not lead a life that was any different from other people – just normal.

Interviewer: What is your practice now?

Rae: I continue to doo chit (observe the mind). Anything that happens I would observe and follow. Just observe. For example, if I’m taking care of my son ... he might be naughty and wouldn’t do what I tell him, I’d have anger. Then I would observe it and know, “Ah, anger’s in my mind.” So I’d see anger and follow it. If anger comes up I know about it. If a pretty woman comes past, my eyes might wander and attention is going out ... I’d know that attention reached outside, to look at the woman. I just keep observing in daily life just like this. If I was watching TV and getting immersed in the program, after a while I’d discover that, oh, my mind has got stuck in the TV ... there’s mindfulness to understand that my mind had immersed itself in the program. So this is the method of follow and observe things that happened. Or if I was working I’d have to read and concentrate a lot ... I’d forget myself by being immersed in the content of what I was reading. But I’d soon realise this when I look up, “Ah, my mind was in the book.” So I just observe. That is the way of practice in daily life ... I am still unable to sit and meditate, to this day. Also walking meditation was no good for me. My mind would wander endlessly if I sat ... actually now I’d fall asleep more. Walking meditation would cause heaviness for me, so heavy it would feel like my
head was like a rock falling down. So I'm unable to do things in a formalistic sense like many teachers teach. Instead I follow and observe my mind in daily life instead.

Interview: So does it start from when you wake up?

Rae: Yes from wake up to sleep. I can do it sometimes and sometimes not. Like if I'm teaching I can't observe. Or whenever I'm working observation can't be done. The mind would think about the subject and the mouth would talk and the hand often has to write as well. You can't practice *doo chit*.

Interviewer: Do you sometime become mindful when working?

Rae: Just glimpses here and there. Like if I'm talking I might then reach for a pen. Then I might realise I'd was not mindful, OK then pick up the pen. So then while writing would forget again but that's alright. This is my way, not taking it too seriously, just continue doing it.

Interviewer: What is the principle of the method of *doo chit* in your understanding?

Rae: The practice of *doo chit* is quite simple. It's just about constant self-awareness. When you have self-awareness then whatever happens in the mind you can easily observe. You don't have to keep looking. If you have self-awareness constantly and whatever you're doing then if anger comes up in the mind you will know it. You will know that mind is filled with anger but you will not dwell in it. If the mind has lust then often you'll know it. Of perhaps if you become engrossed in something then you'll know that this has happened, "Oh, I wasn't mindful." There's nothing exceptional that you have to look at. It's just being aware and then you will see things in the mind automatically. The first step is to practice being self-aware really often. Then after that seeing, things will just follow. It will be automatic. That's it, that's all there is really. There's nothing that you have to do more than this.

Interviewer: At the moment what is the purpose of your practice?

Rae: Why am I doing it? For most people when they come and practice they want to experience the state of nirvana, or the state where suffering is nonexistent. I became interested because I was suffering and I found out that Buddhism teaches that we can live in this world without suffering. So I want to discover that state. To this day I'm doing it because of this, nothing more.

Interviewer: You had a taste once already.

Rae: Yes once I tasted it I understood that there's nothing better to do than this. The worldly things really they're just nonsensical ... really nonsensical. Things like wealth, prestige, praise - I really don't care for them at all. It's just no fun any more. It's much more interesting to practice *doo chit*, to observe things that arise
in the mind. My enjoyment lies there - this is called *chanda*. *Chanda* does not lie in my work anymore or in worldly things. Those worldly things ... if I have them OK and if I don’t have them that’s OK too. Like in my work I do what only what my duty requires. If it’s beyond my duty then I won’t do it. Instead I use the time to *doo chit*. My work at the moment is to teach ... main job is to teach and so I teach. Whatever workload they give me I do it. But I’m not doing research now although in fact I didn’t do it in the first place because I used the time for practice instead.

Interviewer: I would presume that if you work like this progress in your work would be quite difficult?

Rae: Yes, no progress at all. It will stop. But I just don’t want to do these things because I feel that they waste my time. It’s much more worthwhile to develop mindfulness and to observe my mind. I feel that this is much more valuable.

Interviewer: What is your ultimate goal in life now?

Rae: If you ask me about the goal ... my goal is to practice dharma to end all this lifetime. That’s the true goal. But before I started practicing dharma I just wanted to get rich. Yes, I wanted wealth, a good job and status. I’ve invested in a business before. I wanted a decent car and, like others, good status and prestige, and those sorts of things ... those were the goals that were pretty worldly. But when I turned to dharma practice my goal changed: I didn’t want to achieve anything worldly; I just wanted to do well with my practice.

Interviewer: Can you tell me how this change came about?

Rae: Right from the beginning when I started meditating and listening to dharma according to Luang Pu Jien or from reading books, my mind began to discover that worldly things are just suffering ... they just cause us to suffer. When I invested in a business I did not gain any happiness from that. I was always thinking about it. Like if we got an order I’d be constantly worrying about it, I’d have to work hard and I’d have to deliver it on time ... those sorts of things. I didn’t see how it made me happy! So I started seeing that there was no happiness there. Then I’d have an argument with my partner ... problems with him. In the end we had to call it a day.

Interviewer: So you did that before.

Rae: Yes I’ve done it and stopped. Doing that I didn’t see my life being happy at all. Even if I got money from it there was no real happiness there. The only good thing was having money for do this and that. In the evening I would go out have meals with friends but there was no true happiness in the heart.

Interviewer: Did you see that back then when you were investing?
Rae: Yes I saw it then when I invested in a business and felt that this was useless ... that there was no happiness in life.

Interviewer: Other people who invest would also experience problems like you but they wouldn't think much since money is coming in.

Rae: They see happiness in monetary things or success in business. But maybe they might not see - or they see I don’t know - that behind it all, the mind is very stressed. Your mind and your heart are not at ease at all. Finding a moment of peace is very difficult to find unless you go and meditate or something like that.

Interviewer: Is what you are saying ... there is no single moment that the mind is at peace?

Rae: Yes it is very rare, except perhaps when you’re not working and you’re on holiday. Then you find out that when you’re not working the mind is at ease. But while you’re working or doing business it’s always stressful. So when I was done with that business venture I never thought about doing anything again, anything that had to do with investing or those sorts of things.

Interviewer: How long was that ago?

Rae: When I had just graduated when I had a lot of energy with friends. I did it for two years and then gave up.

Interviewer: So you were practicing with Luang Pu Jieng then?

Rae: Yes nothing deep but I was starting to see life that was not joyful or comfortable.

Interviewer: Do you have any difficulties with practice at the moment?

Rae: No, none at all. I practice in a very casual, easy way. Very relaxed. I can do it all the time in my daily life. I can do it while looking after my child. I can do it when I'm angry with him – I'll see anger in the mind. Sometime I was going to spank him and then became aware and so I stopped immediately and used other techniques to teach him instead.

Interviewer: How old is he?

Rae: Four. At work I’d practice when there’s free time or talk about dharma or things like that. It’s very easy-going, not serious.

Interviewer: How long have you been practicing seeing meeting Luang Por Asoke?

Rae: Met him beginning B.E. 2543 ... so over five years now.
Interviewer: Has your life changed from that day to today?

Rae: There has been no change in my everyday life. I have enough to live on and so on according to government salary. I don't have to struggle all that much. But my mental state has changed a lot. Changed a lot.

Interviewer: How would you compare that first day and today?

Rae: If you use the mind that experiences suffering as a measure, there's very little suffering from day-to-day, worldly things for me. Really very little suffering.

Interviewer: What do you mean by worldly sufferings?

Rae: Like suffering in work, I don't suffer anymore. Suffering about people around me, I don't suffer from that either. I have a child but I don't suffer. For some people they suffer because of having a child, for example, how to get the child into school, education planning, finding the best school and so on. For me I'm not too bothered. If I have money then I'll send but if not my child will go to government school. So there's been quite a change concerning suffering because of situations, circumstances or things that are worldly. They have virtually ceased to be a problem. I can accept any circumstance. Anything that happens I can accept it.

Interviewer: Usually there is considerable suffering concerning the family like sending kids to school or marital arguments. What is it like for you?

Rae: I don't have any suffering on this issue. I don't have any arguments with my wife – nothing at all.

Interviewer: And before did you argue?

Rae: No, we didn't argue before either. I didn't have any family problems in the beginning. But now I don't experience any stress or get upset in general worldly affairs and normally there should be, right? Should be?

Interviewer: You work in an institution like this and there must be lots of politics and competition and other things.

Rae: Yes that's normal. I avoid them all. Anything unnecessary I will stay away from. But if there's work I have to do then I do it as usual. Like changing organisation structure. Before I did a lot of this kind of thing, organisation management ... because while I was a student here I encountered many things that weren't good which I wanted changed. So when I became one of the faculty members I tried to make improvements. I tried to do a lot. But lately I'm beginning to be at peace with things. I'm beginning to understand that on many things I just can't do anything about, and therefore I have leave them and have equanimity.

Interviewer: It sounds like you did quite a lot in the beginning, to change things?
Rae: Yes, I've had a lot of problems with the senior management because I tried to instigate change.

Interviewer: Did you experience suffering and tiredness then?

Rae: Yes I was tired and suffered. I was not happy really at all. When you think about making the world a better place, or to make society better, you have to fight with other people because there's no easy way that you can just waft along. The laws or rules in place that are wrong or the organisation culture that's inappropriate that you're trying to change ... these things you have to come up against people on many levels. It's especially the senior management that you go against most.

Interviewer: You now have more equanimity and less involvement. Is this because of dharma?

Rae: Yes. I've begun to understand the fundamental truth of this world. Begun to understand ... when I started observing the mind I recognised its ability to generate illusions and its attachment to things. Then I understood that other people were the same as me. And I started to understand that many problems just can't be dealt with because they are out of my powers, my capacity to do anything. I just can't change them. So as I started to understand this I began to let go, and instead turn attention to developing my own mind which is something I can do for sure – no one can interfere with that. If I want to develop my own mind then I just keep doing it. As for those other things I just stay within the existing rules, norms and etiquettes. Those that I disagree with I can only ... from before I went in and fought for change, now I just tell them how things should be but the final decision is left for those with responsibility to do it. I don't interfere anymore. All I do is give opinion on what I think is best and right way.

Interviewer: Some people might argue that dharma practice causes people to become too passive and not go and make change and improvement required. What is your opinion on this?

Rae: No, it's not as if I don't do anything and just leave things to be. This is something different altogether. When I said I didn't interfere I meant that anything that was above my powers to act I won't do it.

Interviewer: And before you did?

Rae: Before I pushed hard to get things done. But now I don't do this sort of thing ... anything to do with change and so on. If I'm in a position to give opinion then I will do so. I speak a lot during meetings. I tell them that this is how things should be done and how that should be done ... many things. But I don't have the responsibility to do them. My duty is give opinion on what should be done and how. Then it is up to the people responsible to do what they think is appropriate. It's up to their judgement. My duty finishes when I give them information and
opinion. However, if I have the responsibility to do them then I do it. I carry out
my duty. That’s normal.

Interviewer: It seems to me that before not only did you give opinion but then you
went and fought for things as well.

Rae: Yes I fought. Yes. The things I gave opinion on and then they might not do
it I went and fought to get it done. Anything I saw as not being right I went to
interfere. It was like that.

Interviewer: There was suffering there.

Rae: Yes definitely. I suffered because I tried to get things done in the way I
wanted, even though it wasn’t possible. It’s not possible. For example, if there’s a
bad rule and I try to change it this isn’t really possible, because it’s beyond my
duty. But before anything I saw as not being right I tried to change. Tried to find a
way to do it.

Interviewer: When you see things that should be changed is the desire to get that
change done still there?

Rae: If you ask me whether I still want to change then, yes, if this is possible. However, it’s not like it must be done. This is because I’m just one person in the
organisation. I’m not the leader or even the main player. I’m just one person. If
you ask me whether I want to see change then, yes, I do want to see change. Do
I want to see a things getting better? Yes, of course I want to see this. Normally
I’m for these sorts of things.

Interviewer: And do you observe your mind then?

Rae: Sometime I’m aware but sometime I’m not – it’s not for sure. However, during meetings I give my opinions fully and do that as usual. Whether the result
is achieved or not that’s not serious anymore. Now I understand that changes
depend on various factors – it’s doesn’t depend solely on me. It depends on
everyone changing not just me. People may not agree with my opinion because
they have their own perspective. The chance of everyone agreeing is very
unlikely. So any change or development is not easy. In the end if I can’t do
anything then I must let go, and wait if there’s an opportunity to do something. If
there’s an opportunity then I’ll do it but if there’s not then that’s too bad.

Interviewer: What has given rise to this view?

Rae: There are many factors but a major contributor has been the fact that I’ve
been observing my mind (doo chit) and therefore I understand the thinking of
others and their feelings. I understand that everyone is under the spell of
defilements (kilesi) and desire (tanha). Everyone has their own opinion (thithi)
and ego. It’s very hard to change somebody. Even trying to change yourself is
difficult enough, because the mind tends to want to cling on to self-opinion (thithi)
all the time. To change yourself you have to work hard with dharma practice. If you want to change others who don’t even practice dharma that’s impossible. Now I understand this ... this mechanism.

Interviewer: Is this why you can let go?

Rae: Yes, I can let go.

Interviewer: At present what is the meaning of happiness for you?

Rae: There are happiness ... the normal kinds of happiness is not really happiness. For example, someone having a good life, living in a good environment, encountering only good things, having success – these seem like happiness. However, they’re just worldly happiness. Is there true happiness there? No, doesn’t exist. Doesn’t exist. Behind that happiness lies suffering. There’s no true happiness. Anytime the mind experiences happiness or joy you’ll actually find that the mind is being locked up in a cage - a nice cage. But when you’re suffering it feels like being locked up in a horrible cage. Whichever cage it’s in there’s no freedom for the mind. We’re just locked up with limits and boundaries.

Interviewer: Why do you say this?

Rae: I’ve experienced this state ... this state of the mind. Like as I live normally right now it’s like my mind is imprisoned, in an enclosure of some kind. It’s not truly free.

Interviewer: Do you really feel like that?

Rae: I actually feel that way. That’s the actual experience. Therefore there’s no happiness there. Happiness is just the mind being enclosed in a nice environment, but it’s not free, truly free.

Interviewer: What kind of happiness do you think is possible?

Rae: Well the ordinary happiness I just talked about is possible but if you talk about dharma practice then true happiness doesn’t exist. The thing you have to do is escape from both happiness and suffering ... hence can't call this happiness. Can't call it anymore. It's being above happiness and suffering ... this is what the teachers say, “Above happiness and suffering.” Because the idea of happiness is one of the mind being conditioned by happiness, being overshadowed by happiness. That’s not true freedom. Worldly happiness is just that but happiness in terms of dharma is above worldly things ... is about the mind being at peace, no delusions. A mind that’s joyful and happy can be regarded as happiness but it’s not the ultimate when you really look into it. It’s not the ultimate.
Interviewer: Am I right in saying that you experience little suffering such as heavy heart, frustration etc?

Rae: I only experience minor disturbance in the mind. Say heavy heart, it’s just slight perturbation and when I know about it then it disappears. Like when my son went into hospital the other day I was fine. I didn’t feel anything! OK hospital it is. I wasn’t worried or afraid or ... whatever happens happens. I accept the reality: this is birth, old age and death and these are ordinary.

Interviewer: When your son went into hospital was there in any worry at all?

Rae: None whatsoever.

Interviewer: None?

Rae: None. I was very still ... didn’t feel anything

Part 2 (28 July 2005)

Interviewer: I’m still quite astounded. He was OK and it was minor I gather but had it been serious or something happened would you feel anything?

Rae: I don’t know but I think I can accept the reality of things. I can accept.

Interviewer: I seems like you don’t have to observe the mind (*doo chit*)?

Rae: It’s automatic. Automatic.

Interviewer: Is it automatic observation or is it totally automatic?

Rae: Don’t know. Should be totally automatic. Because nothing came up for me to observe ... like worry or agitation, they didn’t appear.

Interviewer: Really?

Rae: Yes.

Interviewer: Are there anything that causes worry at all?

Rae: No I don’t think there’s anything that is heavy.

Interviewer: That’s really good.

Rae: I can’t find any, no, nothing that’s heavy.

Interviewer: Are you parents still alive?

Rae: Yes they’re alive.
Interviewer: Do you have any opinion on karma, samsara and those sorts of concepts and do they have any influence on your life?

Rae: Karma ... if you understand the principle of karma it will allow you to let go of all kinds of worries and agitation. Like I told you that my son was ill ... if you look at it from the perspective of karma then you understand that the reason he was ill was because of karma, that he created which inevitably has consequence. Cannot avoid it or escape from it. How badly he suffers is dependent on the seriousness of the karma he perpetrated. And if he was to die then it would be because of the karma he created that causes him to fall ill and have to die. This is a fact of karma. Therefore if you understand the principle of karma then you can let go of things, of worries. So you remain unperturbed and have equanimity if things happen to relatives and family – the mind will remain calm. There will be no commotion, sorrow, worries or any of these things. And when the mind is calm with equanimity then problems can be solved easily. If the mind is still this allows us to analyse and use reason on problems and find the best solution. This is a much better way of doing things. Like the principle of karma ... it will help you to understand the world and how to live life, and it will also help greatly in ridding the mind of worries. However, in contrast if you use the principle of karma in another way in conjunction with cycle of birth and death ... some people think that you must only do good deeds like make merits. But this will result in them being easy prey from con artists, for example, they will use merit to bait you into give donations. They might get fooled by people who tell them that you have to do such and such merit in order to get such and such thing or be reborn in certain states. These people will get fooled into giving until they themselves suffer or their family suffers because they don't understand the principle of karma. The correct understanding of the principle of karma can ease worries and help the mind settle and be calm. Incorrect understanding can lead to being fooled or being conned or being used by other people. Incorrect understanding also leads to believing that you must only create good karma, do good deeds. In fact good karma still cause rebirth. And even if you're reborn it doesn't mean that you can always do good karma because you might lose your way and do bad karma that results in suffering. Hence there is continual rebirth that's never-ending. But if you understand well the principle of karma then you can use it to remind yourself to find a way to stop the cycle of rebirth. Buddhism will be the result from this kind of endeavour. If you ask me if the principle of karma is true then I would say yes, but the point is how do we make use of it? There are just three ways to do this: use it to help you let go of worries; use it to help you do good deeds so that you can have good rebirth or be fortuitous; and, use it to push you to find a way to escape from both happiness and suffering that result from rebirth.

Interviewer: What lead you to explain it this way?

Rae: My understanding just emerged this way. I understood this way after I had been observing mind (doo chit) for some time. After the time when my mind merged there was a change and these kind of understanding came about automatically.
Interviewer: Is that so? Before did you not think this way?

Rae: No. I didn’t think this way. I didn’t understand at all.

Interviewer: Even though you read all those books?

Rae: I’d read so much but didn’t understand anything. No I didn’t understand key ideas or anything. This is all there is to the principle of karma but if you become muddled in it ... some people take an interest in the law of karma and try to analyse what kind of karma gives rise to a particular birth state or what consequence arise if a certain karma is committed right now, then that’s another matter altogether. This is thinking and analysis on a subject that is beyond the realm or normal people.

Interviewer: Did you see suffering clearer after the mind coming together experience?

Rae: I saw suffering in a different way. Before I would understand that suffering is when one encounters a bad situation ... anything that happens that’s bad is suffering. Then it changed to an understanding that any form of attachment, to anything, is suffering. A mind attached to goodness is suffering. A mind attached to unwholesomeness is suffering. A mind attached to equanimity is suffering. Attachment to the mind itself or the body is suffering. The understanding of suffering is completely different; it is much more subtle.

Interviewer: So do you see the mind reaching out and attaching itself?

Rae: Yes. Any mind that reaches out and attaches itself or holds on to anything is suffering, like I just told you that happiness is suffering. Just another form of suffering that is more subtle. When I saw that the mind holding on to happiness ... in reality it’s just another form of suffering that is more subtle.

Interviewer: What is the importance of *sila* to you?

Rae: Actually I’ve adhered to the five precepts from the beginning when I took an interesting Buddhism. I tried to keep them all the time. Even before that for example the fifth precept when I was attending technical college renown for disorderly behaviour I never drank alcohol. I didn’t smoke cigarettes. All my friends, the whole class, drank and smoked. When they drank alcohol I sipped Pepsi or Coke.

Interviewer: How did you manage to do that?

Rae: Don’t know. I just didn’t want to drink. But if you asked me if I’ve tried, yes I’ve sipped once or twice to see what it tastes like. That’s all. I’ve hardly touched liquor at all. I’ve had beer a few times, the most when I was in Germany for training. When I was there Germans took us to places and bought us beer. OK
so I drank beer but if you asked me if I wanted it, no I didn’t. I just drank it, went through the motion. The idea of *sila* ... from way before I never really wanted to do anything that broke the precepts.

Interviewer: So do you drink any alcohol now?

Rae: No.

Interviewer: Do you adhere to the other precepts strictly?

Rae: It’s just the five precepts. I don’t take more than that. Though in fact after a point I don’t have to be weary of anything – it’s like automatic. Everything become like automatic.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Rae: Like if I’m about to do something that will break the precept the mind will awake and know it immediately. Then it will release, let go of the cause that is driving the action that will break the precept.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Rae: For example ... I don’t often encounter these things.

Interviewer: Let’s say the fourth precept. That can get quite subtle not just blatant lying to deceive.

Rae: Yes. You must understand that it’s not that you can't speak anything that is untrue. For example, I still lie to my son but my motivation for doing so is to stop him from doing certain things. Like if he is very naughty and wants to go outside at night and so I say to him, “There are tigers outside.” This is clearly a lie but I just say it matter-of-factly but it’s not lying to get rich, get praise or gain face, or even to get myself of the hook for something wrong I committed. There’s none of that.

Interviewer: At the subtle level, what about if you’re in a meeting do you ever say things which might gain you face or credit?

Rae: No. Doesn’t happen. Wrong is wrong. If I do something wrong then I accept it. I never say, “I didn’t do it.” I just say it straight that I did it wrong. I did it.

Interviewer: What about something that is true but you have to get credit for it?

Rae: No. None. I don’t think so.

Interviewer: Were you always like this from childhood, very straight?
Rae: Mostly I was like that. Mostly. I was like very ethical ... it’s like I had ethics \((\text{sila})\) from when I was a child, since I can remember things. I had ethics from very young.

Interviewer: It seems like your original foundation.

Rae: Yes, it seems like my foundation. Like the third precept, do I think about breaking this precept? No, I don’t think about doing it at all. Have I ever been to a brothel? No, never done it since before. Those kinds of places I’ve never thought about going to them.

Interviewer: Can I ask you how did you grow up as a child and what was the family like?

Rae: My family was average middle-class. Just normal middle-class. There was nothing special. Nothing at all.

Interviewer: And you parents? Was there dharma?

Rae: My mother likes to make merits. But she just likes to make merits, that’s all. She doesn’t practice dharma. No one in my family practices dharma at all in fact. From the beginning there was nobody and til this day they don’t practice. The most they do is go to the temple and make merit usually during Buddhist festivals. So I grew up in a very ordinary family.

Interviewer: So why did you have a foundation that took \text{sila} seriously?

Rae: I don’t know. There doesn’t seem to be any ... I don’t think it came from my family background ... I don’t think so. Because my siblings they’ve come completely separate ways. Different path altogether. My sister doesn’t want to have anything to do with dharma. My brother concerns himself with mystical things. All different paths completely. So doesn’t seem to be from my family background because we all grew in the same environment.

Interviewer: I guess some things cannot be explained?

Rae: Yes, some things just can't be explained.

Interviewer: Has your social relationship with other people, even those you make not like, changed since you started practicing dharma with Luang Por Asoke?

Rae: Yes, there have been changes. Some changes but in the positive direction. Like my co-workers and staff ... before when I was always fighting for things these people didn’t like me much. That’s because at work I would be very blunt in criticising people – it was very direct. They didn’t like it. But things have changed. When I understood I used a different approach. For example, instead saying things really seriously I do it gradually or waited for appropriate opportunities.
Therefore the attitudes of people I work with have changed. At one level for sure it’s changed a lot.

Interviewer: Did the fact that you understand them better contribute to this?

Rae: Partly? Yes, I understand them more. I understand the way people are: some people avoid responsibility or they might not like performing their duty and if I push them to do it they become annoyed. People have all sorts of excuses. Before I would get upset, “It’s their duty. Why don’t they do it?” I would have reactions to these things. Now I’ve started to understand that everyone wants an easy life – no one wants to work. Everyone wants to have a life that’s comfortable, might not want to work. So I began to understand the situation with each person and to learn about people much more.

Interviewer: And if you want them to do a job what do you do?

Rae: Now I don’t know because I’m no longer with the group of people involved in management work. Therefore there’s little opportunity for that kind of involvement – very little.

Interviewer: Have your friends changed?

Rae: Actually I don’t have many friends. I don’t socialise or mix with people ... from way back, when I was studying. The friends I had ... we knew each other but it was nothing close. And those friends that I went to school with I hardly ever talk to them. Just very little contact.

Interviewer: At present what kinds of people are close to you?

Rae: Close to me? They’re the disciples of Luang Por Asoke. This is one small group of people that see each other regularly and talk.

Interviewer: Do you meet on the Internet?

Rae: Yes and we meet normally as well. They come and help me on my books. Generally we talk about dharma and things. My socialising is limited and not much outside this area.

Interviewer: Seems like only kalayanamitr?

Rae: Mostly. And my relatives, that’s just the usual, nothing special.

Interviewer: And with your son. Is he four years old now?

Rae: Yes, four.

Interviewer: Back then you had already met Luang Por Asoke. Why did you have a child?
Rae: I didn’t intend to have a child at all! I didn’t intend to. We tried birth control. Obviously I didn’t work. It was a mistake [laugh]. If you asked me I never really wanted a child. I didn’t intend to have a child. But since I have one then I have one. After a point I’m perfectly happy to accept the situation.

Interviewer: If you were to choose ...

Rae: If I was to choose I wouldn’t have one. We tried not to have one but it didn’t work out.

Interviewer: Does dharma have any impact on consumption?

Rae: Yes it has an impact. Like in eating before I used to eat and eat even though I was full. Didn’t stop. Just kept on eating. Now I stop when I begin to feel full. Now I know how to eat moderately, more reasonably. As for other forms of consumption ... I was never an excessive person. I used clothes until they wore out, every one of them. Like this pair of pants here I’ve had for six or seven years.

Interviewer: Was like this for a long time?

Rae: Yes.

Interviewer: So what about now?

Rae: I will buy only what is necessary. Only what is necessary. Lately I hardly buy anything because other people buy them for me. Like when my sister comes from overseas she’ll buy clothes for me. Therefore my consumption is only what is necessary. I hardly consume things beyond necessity.

Interviewer: Your government salary is small.

Rae: Yes, but if you really use it well there is enough leftover.

Interviewer: So can you live comfortably?

Rae: Unfortunately now there’s not much leftover because of car expenses that’s quite high. Insurance cost is nearly 20,000 baht and petrol and things. These are quite heavy burdens. It I didn’t have these things then there is enough left for sure. Because even eating out, I don’t do much of that. Just once in a while and then I don’t eat much. If the restaurant is expensive I don’t go. Maybe I’ll go and eat there once or twice to know what it’s like or if I have to take people there like I might have to relatives to a decent place. But for myself I eat at ordinary places. Sometimes I will eat fast food at the shopping mall e.g. KFC which is very basic. As for Sizzler I’ve eaten there so now I know what it’s like there, and when I saw the price there I was quite shocked. I can’t afford to eat there frequently. As for
Japanese restaurants I hardly eat there at all. I generally eat very basic stuff. My life has always been like that and so you can't see that much change.

Interviewer: Does your wife practice too?

Rae: Yes, she also practices.

Interviewer: Have there been any changes with your wife?

Rae: No change. It's been like this always. We've always had similar views and attitudes from the beginning. Don't have much problems.

Interviewer: And did she start practicing at the same time?

Rae: Yes, we went to see Luang Por Asoke together. We studied together. Our lives are very simple ... very simple.

Interviewer: Luang Por Asoke has said that when one sees emptiness this is the same for outside and inside?

Rae: That's is a very high level of dharma. I'm not capable of seeing that. I can fathom the emptiness outside but whenever I look inside it's never empty. It's very difficult. Very difficult. No still today I don't understand it. I don't see it clearly.

Interviewer: What is your opinion on Buddhadasa's idea of emptiness? If you really see dharma how would you view the outside world, nature, living things and the world?

Rae: You would see things as normal. The meaning of emptiness outside is that when we look out the mind won't go out and grasp it. It won't grasp things that we see outside, or things that happen. We'll see that the mind won't cling on to things. Therefore the meaning of emptiness according to Buddhadasa is a mind that doesn't cling on to things. Therefore if we look outside and the mind doesn't go out and cling then we will understand emptiness that is devoid of grasping and clinging. But when I observe my mind and my body I still see that there's clinging to body and mind. That's why I said that when I look inside I still can't make out because every time I look I see clinging and attachment. Every time I observe I see this attachment to my mind. Unlike the outside which I can observe normally and there's no attachment. But there's not much difference to other people. The only difference is whether the mind becomes attached or not.

Interviewer: What do you plan for your future?

Rae: There's some planning. For example, I'm thinking about retiring after I complete twenty-five years of government service. I'll stay home and practice fully, because working doesn't allow full practice. This is my plan but I'm not sure whether it can be done since my son is growing up fast. There is the expense of
his education and so on and so I’m not sure whether my plan will be possible. But if I can do it I will go and stay at home.

Interviewer: How many years of service now?

Rae: Eighteen already. Only seven or eight more years. I plan to work no more than another ten years. And if there’s no additional burden they I want to retire and live at home. I want to do something small so I have a little income so I won’t suffer.

Interviewer: Have you ever thought of being ordained?

Rae: No, I’ve never thought about it, that I have to be ordained. No never thought about it. I just practiced from the beginning and as I went along I realised that you can do it without being a monk. It might be slower, that’s all. If you’re not a monk it doesn’t mean you can’t practice. You can practice but the environment might not be as conducive as if you were a monk. And now I can’t even think about ordination since my son is still small. There’s no chance. If I go off then my son will suffer since my wife’s salary is not enough.

Interviewer: What does your wife do?

Rae: She’s a government worker. Her salary alone is not enough to cover the expenses especially in Bangkok where it is high. No, ordination has not crossed my mind. I’ll just keep on going as normal just like this.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Rae: My life has been very simple, easy and never dramatic.

Field notes

• Talked on mobile to make appointment. He was friendly and very ready to help out. Offered to make appointment for the next day which I declined. Emailed later for better details in communications

Interview Day

• Arrived early at around 9.00 am for 10am appointment
• I was very tired and my ear was very bad. Walking around the campus was not pleasant at all and it was difficult to find his room. The campus was not particularly pleasant, messy and unattractive.
• I found his office next to a large laboratory. He was on his own and didn’t seem to be doing much. He suggested we go down to a better place downstairs. He was polite but didn’t smile unlike most Thai. Small talk was strained and he did not seem particularly friendly. Everything was business-like but there was no friction or hesitancy though. Despite the lack of warmth I
think he was quite willing to do the interview. I did not feel very comfortable especially because I couldn’t hear very well and felt sick. Nevertheless we proceeded in a large meeting room with noisy air con.

Impression of Rae
• Rae was taciturn, quiet, softly spoken.
• He had an aloof demeanour that at first was a little unnerving, but not because it was unpleasant but because I’ve known many Thais who hold back because of ego and pretence. However, after spending time with him I knew that he was genuine – just a man of few but sincere words.
• He certainly seemed stable and not at all emotional. In fact throughout the 2 hours or so he showed virtually no emotions at all – just raised voice here and there or slight laughter. However, he was not aloof, negative or held back. He just seemed secured in what he was doing and not much was going to shake him. This is something I’ve never seen to this degree in a person: transparent, solid, unflappable, quiet and to the point.
• His character first puzzled me but beneath somewhat cold exterior seem a genuine equanimity that was impressive.

Lunch after the interview
• We had lunch at the cafeteria which was very cheap. He did not eat much (only one bowl of noodle and some fruits) because he said he got fat very easily. I bought the noodle for him.
• Over lunch he informed me that he really didn’t enjoy teaching; he didn’t feel he knew enough. But for him it was the best job because he had plenty of time to Doo Jit. This was because when there were no classes, there was nothing for him to do. He did not do any research or take outside job – he did not want them at all as he said no point to them. However, he was afraid that the university might force academic to do research which it did not do so now.
• He told me his sister went to Chulalongkorn and had the opposite lifestyle of lavish consumption (10,000 baht shirt) while even a cheap shirt he would think long and hard. But he seemed to have no qualms. They seemed on good terms (she buys him good quality shirts) but he is equanimous on persuading her to dharma. He says he use shirts for long, long time like 8 years.
• He also told me that the quality of students is getting worse – much worse than when he started.
• He also suggested that he must ask a writer friend to give a dharma lecture on life or what is in store for them when they graduate. This may give some insight to students.
• Throughout the interview and over lunch, he was placid and did not show any emotions whatsoever. His tone was always the same, demeanour consistently average to slow. He never smiled but did not appear down or cynical either. He was a strange character which I did not anticipate. He was always talking straight, no shyness or hesitantly. Just matter-of-factly, even when he attained first stage of enlightenment (you could not tell there was any excitement at all. I would not have known it if I hadn’t heard about it already.).